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THE NEW COLOSSUS

WHY PUBLIC PENSION FUNDS MIGHT BE THE REAL PROGRESSIVE POWER

by WILLIAM GREIDER

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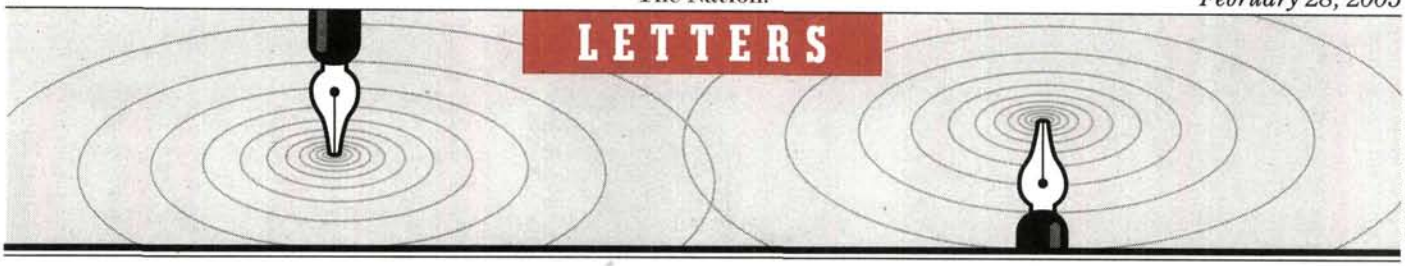

CHRISTOPH NIEMANN

UKRAINE'S POLL: 'THE REAL STORY'

New York City

■ Re *The Nation*'s coverage of the elections in Ukraine and Stephen F. Cohen's "The Media's New Cold War" [Jan. 31]: While I share Cohen's concerns about the manipulation of the story by ideological pundits and their eagerness to turn the elections into a revival of cold war rivalry between Russia and America, I fear he has missed the real story—that of the self-assertion of a majority of the Ukrainian citizenry and their rejection of the corrupt, criminal state that has ruled them since independence. Especially important for progressives has been the role of Ukraine's students and youth in preventing an electoral outcome that few doubted was illegitimate and fraudulent; the students, led by the remarkably disciplined organization Pora, risked their lives and health over several weeks in tent cities in Kiev and elsewhere—this after heavy-handed intimidation from educational and police authorities. The persistence and rapid spread of the protest belies nearly everything that native and foreign observers have asserted about a passive and cynical Ukrainian population. Eventually, the Ukrainian Supreme Court asserted its own independence, declaring the November 21 runoff election invalid and demanding a second runoff.

Certainly the role of outside money and organizations, including the Russian government (President Putin made two campaign trips to Ukraine for Viktor Yanukovich, while Moscow mayor Yuri Luzhkov and Russian parliamentarians visited eastern provinces of Ukraine to inflame regional, religious and ethnic divisions), has muddied the waters of Viktor Yushchenko's victory over the government's choice, Yanukovich, who symbolized the criminal aspects of the Ukrainian state. But whatever the level of outside support, in the end the Ukrainian voters were able to express their opinions in the December 26 election, when the national media were finally freed from the dictates of presidential instructions on what to cover and how, and the level of administrative pressures on key voter blocs was reduced or thwarted.

By keeping the focus on outside actors, *The Nation*'s contributors are perpetuating a longstanding politics of depriving Ukrainians of a sovereign voice or any role save for being pawns of those outside forces. The protests and spread of opposition ought to embolden the forces of democracy around the world, as they have, for example, in the opposition movements in Russia (where liberals from Grigorii Yavlinsky to Irina Khakamada to the human rights organization Memorial and several Russian journalists have been joined in their criticism of Putin's stance on Ukraine by foreign policy hawks like Sergei Karaganov), Kazakhstan, Belarus, Kyrgyzstan and elsewhere. Although we can't predict what chance a Yushchenko government has to overcome the legacy of cynicism and distrust of state institutions it has inherited, the events of the last months bear comparing to the 1989 Polish roundtable and the suppressed student protest in Tiananmen Square. MARK VON HAGEN

COHEN REPLIES

New York City

■ My friend and colleague Mark von Hagen regrets that I "missed the real story" of Ukraine's presidential election—"the self-assertion of a majority of the Ukrainian citizenry."

I did not write about that story for two reasons. First, it was the subject of almost daily reports and editorials in the mainstream, mass-circulation American press for nearly two months. Other than to demonstrate piety, why should I, too, have written about an already well-known story?

Second, as the accomplished historian von Hagen certainly knows, there is rarely, if ever, only one "real story" in major events. I chose to write about one that had been ignored—the way the US press resorted to double-standard, cold war habits in commenting on Russia's role in the Ukrainian crisis. Who can say for sure which will turn out in the long run to be the most "real" story? STEPHEN F. COHEN

WAL-MART: WE EMPTY OUR TRASH

Bentonville, Ark.

■ Liza Featherstone's January 3 cover story, "Down and Out in Discount America," presents some theories about Wal-Mart and an odd conclusion that it's a bad thing to help lower-income Americans. Featherstone asserts that Wal-Mart builds stores only in low-income areas (presumably to exploit the poor). This means she either didn't know about our stores in areas like Palm Springs, California; Scottsdale, Arizona; Park City, Utah; and Plano, Texas; or chose not to discuss them. Wherever we locate, our mission is the same: to provide things that people need or want at prices that make life more affordable for them.

Most of our savings come not from the exploitation of employees but from things like large-volume buying, inventory management and distribution technology. Our CEO and other executives share hotel rooms on the road, fly coach and empty their own wastebaskets to save money for our customers.

Our full-time associates make almost twice the federal minimum wage on average (not $8, as Featherstone asserts), with health insurance, a profit-sharing 401(k) plan, bonuses, a new discounted mortgage program, tuition discounts, company contributions to a stock savings plan and discounts on merchandise.

Featherstone asserts that women are somehow ill served by Wal-Mart because Wal-Mart is a defendant in the "largest" gender discrimination suit in America (of course, any such case against Wal-Mart would be large, because Wal-Mart employs more people than just about anyone else). The facts are that the stories of the six plaintiffs in this case are not representative of the experience most women have here. Also, 60 percent of Wal-Mart associates are female, and currently just over 40 percent of our managers are women, including professionals like pharmacists. Women at Wal-Mart run $100 million stores and multibillion-dollar divisions—some larger than entire Fortune 500 companies. Many worked their way up to these jobs from hourly positions in our stores. As a matter of fact, two of our female officers, Linda Dillman and Claire Watts, were recently named to *Fortune*'s "Most Powerful Women in Business" list.

We find it ironic that even as Featherstone makes a living criticizing Wal-Mart, at least one of her books can be found on our website at walmart.com (at a very reasonable price). Her conclusions about our company, however, continue to be off base. SARAH CLARK

Director of corporate communications
Wal-Mart Stores, Inc.

Davis, Calif.

■ To clarify Liza Featherstone's reporting on Wal-Mart and elaborate on the fight in California around healthcare: In 2003 the California legislature did pass a bill that required large employers to provide health coverage to their workers and their families or pay a fee into a statewide purchasing pool that would provide such coverage. It set a standard for on-the-job health benefits similar to the minimum wage for pay, and thus would have expanded coverage to more than 1 million working uninsured.

But in 2004 the fast-food and retail industries led a referendum (Prop 72) to repeal this major reform, with McDonald's and Wal-Mart among the top five contributors to its defeat. The healthcare measure still got 49.2 percent of the vote, despite $18 million worth of scare tactics marshaled against it. Health advocates in California and in other states will use the closeness of this vote to show that health reform is winnable and to continue the fight for workers and their families to get the health coverage they deserve. ANTHONY WRIGHT

Executive director
Health Access California

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EDITORIALS

Indecent Proposal

America's budget is more than a blizzard of incomprehensible numbers. Our values are reflected in its priorities: It is a statement of what kind of nation we are and what we hope to be. By that standard, George W. Bush's budget is a shamefully indecent proposal. It violates common morality and common sense. It mortgages our future while burdening the vulnerable and protecting the privileged. It should be discarded with the contempt it deserves.

Bush presents the budget and its sacrifices as vital "fiscal discipline" to begin closing the yawning deficits. But where did those deficits come from, and who will pay the cost?

America now spends almost as much as the rest of the world combined on its military; the Pentagon's budget is larger than the entire economy of Russia. It is also the largest source of waste, fraud and mismanagement in the federal government. But Bush demands that military spending continue to go up.

America suffers from an inequality not seen in the past century, with CEOs making 500 times more than the average worker. Bush has insisted on past tax cuts that benefit mainly the rich, while working families are losing ground. Yet Bush demands in this new budget that the wealthy pay even less in taxes, adding new tax breaks and making the old ones permanent. Corporate taxes are lower as a percentage of revenue than at almost any time since we began keeping records, in the 1930s. Yet Bush demands that corporations pay even less in taxes and that their dodges and loopholes remain protected.

Who will pay the bill? The weakest and most vulnerable—the elderly in nursing homes, poor children with working parents, kids who need help learning to read, veterans who are sick, poor families in need of housing, workers whose rights are trampled, those who rely on mass transit, students whose parents can't afford to send them to college.

Bush would slash support for Medicaid, the vital safety net of healthcare programs. He would break his promise to fund schools. He would make college less affordable. He would throw kids out of Head Start, childcare, after-school and literacy programs. He would leave streets more dangerous and the environment less safe. He would set the poor and elderly up for even deeper cuts in the future, while increased military spending and the new tax cuts for the wealthy would leave the nation even further in debt.

The immorality of this budget is matched only by the dishonesty of its presentation. It budgets nothing for the cost of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. It does not account for the $4.5 trillion the President proposes to borrow over twenty years to privatize Social Security. It excludes the cost of revising the alternative minimum tax (originally intended to insure that upper-income taxpayers paid at least some tax, but increasingly affecting the middle class), which the President will insist on. For the first time in decades, it refuses to reveal the cuts in services the Administration projects over the next five years.

Hypocrisy, wrote La Rochefoucauld, is the tribute that vice pays to virtue. The White House has now rolled out a campaign to describe this budget as fair and balanced, one that does not "suddenly [turn] our backs on the most needy people in our society." The hypocrisy adds insult to injury. Call on your legislators now. Demand that they ignore this indecent proposal and start over, crafting something that reflects our values and begins to serve the needs of the nation, not the appetites of the privileged.

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Democrats & Withdrawal

In the time since the historic election in Iraq, several liberal Democrats in Congress have been trying to kick-start a national debate—or at least a Congressional debate—on withdrawing US troops from Iraq. But this has been a tough mission, made even more difficult by resistance from within their party.

Just before the Iraqi election, Representative Lynn Woolsey introduced a resolution—with twenty-four Democratic cosponsors—demanding the "immediate withdrawal" of troops, insisting that "Iraq is no closer to becoming a stable democracy than it was two years ago" and that this "losing effort" was not worth the life of another US soldier. Representative Marty Meehan released a white paper urging adoption of a specific timetable for a phased withdrawal over twelve to eighteen months. This would change the "dynamic" in Iraq, he says, by demonstrating that the United States has no intention of controlling Iraq and by creating space for the development of Iraqi political and security institutions. Similarly, Senator Ted Kennedy proposed that George W. Bush and the new Iraqi government negotiate a schedule for a "drawdown." At least 12,000 US troops, maybe more, should leave at once, Kennedy said, "to ease the pervasive sense of occupation."

The advocates of disengagement have yet to gain traction. House Democrats—especially in small numbers—have little ability to influence the agenda of the GOP-controlled House. (Only one House GOPer has broached the subject of withdrawal in public: Howard Coble, a North Carolinian close to Bush.) And the withdrawalists have basic disagreements among themselves. Each argues that US forces are fueling the insurgency. ("If we withdraw our troops," Woolsey maintains, "we will remove a major cause for the insurgency.") But while Woolsey wants to start removing all troops now and offers no timetable, Kennedy has proposed beginning with a modest withdrawal right away and completing the pullout "as early as possible in 2006." Meehan does not support immediate withdrawal. "The chaos that would result," he says, would undermine US credibility and destabilize the entire region. Eighteen months should be sufficient, he argues, to train an Iraqi security force that can effectively fight insurgents. He envisions a US force of 30,000 to 50,000 remaining beyond that time. "If I thought we could responsibly withdraw immediately, I'd be for that," Meehan remarks. "But that could lead to civil war." Asked about this possibility, Woolsey says, "Pulling out has more positives than negatives, but there will be negatives."

While these Democrats appear unable to synchronize their withdrawal proposals, other senior Democratic senators—for policy and political reasons—do not want the Democrats to become the pullout party. On *Meet the Press*, John Kerry refused to endorse Kennedy's plan. Carl Levin, a critic of the Bush Administration, said discussion of early troop withdrawals "is putting the cart a little bit ahead of the horse." Joe Biden has blasted the White House's handling of the war but declared he would vote for up to $200 billion to support the military mission in Iraq. He says talk of disengagement is "premature." Evan Bayh, decrying Kennedy's proposal, remarked, "I think to cut and run at this juncture would be a terrible mistake."

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COMMENT

The Democrats' leaders in Congress have tried to straddle the issue, promoting what might be called an "exit-strategy strategy." Both Senate minority leader Harry Reid and House minority leader Nancy Pelosi have called on Bush to develop an "exit strategy." Neither has suggested starting or scheduling the removal of troops. Responding to the State of the Union address—in which Bush rejected "an artificial timetable for leaving Iraq"—Pelosi criticized the President for having "no clear plan...for ending our presence in Iraq." She then listed the "key elements" of a "credible plan": accelerating training of Iraqi security forces, speeding up reconstruction in Iraq, intensifying regional diplomacy. This was what Kerry pushed during the campaign. Pelosi said nothing about troop levels. Days after that, Kennedy noted that the schedule for removing troops should be negotiated with the new Iraqi government, with 2006 as a "goal," not a "requirement."

The call for withdrawal—as opposed to an exit strategy—has not spread quickly among Democratic legislators. But it has drawn partisan fire from Republicans and conservatives eager to brand Democrats as weak-kneed retreatists. And the Democratic withdrawalists have—so far—triggered a policy discussion mostly within Democratic quarters. "There is going to be a debate within the party on this," says a senior Democratic Senate staffer. "If you conclude we can't right the situation in Iraq, then why should one more person die? But if you believe that's still possible or that pulling out will lead to even more of a mess that could threaten our national security, then you want to muddle through."

Some Democrats fret about the political cost of adopting a position that would allow Republicans to depict them as defeatists. "I understand that fear very much," Woolsey says. Fortunately, she adds, her district in Northern California is in tune with her own get-out-now stance. "Democrats are grappling with this, and it could end up being divisive," the Senate aide observes. "We Democrats feel compelled to offer positive solutions. But this ain't going to be pretty—either internally for the party or for what's happening in Iraq." Woolsey has no such concern. "I'm pleased," she notes, "that I got the discussion going." DAVID CORN

Connecting the Dots

Given the planetary reach (or do I mean grasp?) of George W. Bush's inaugural speech, it was with relief that I picked up the *New York Times* on the post-inaugural morn and noticed an article that had a sweep to match. In a piece headlined "A Global Map of Influences and Ideas," Roberta Smith took the reader on a tour that ranged from Egypt and Greece to China and Japan, the United States and Europe to Congo and even distant Papua New Guinea. The catch: Smith was writing on the Winter Antiques Show. There were only two news reports that day linking a number of disparate countries, and neither was there thanks to aggressive reportage or op-ed page analytic acumen. In "Cheney Says Israel Might 'Act First' on Iran," David E. Sanger offered a modest report on how the Vice President, briskly questioned by the shock jock (and non-reporter) Don Imus, had threatened Iran with the big stick of the Israeli Air Force and in the process tied together three countries: Israel, Iran and Iraq, with a passing nod to Europe. Then there was a report by Edward Wong, "Top Rebel in Iraq Says War With U.S. May Last for Years," which focused on a new wave of kidnappings of foreigners and so referred to Brazil, England, China and France. Otherwise, on the day the President swept the world into a bag marked Freedom, the *Times* was blissfully clear of geopolitical reportage of any sort.

This has been the state not just of the *Times*, but (with various honorable exceptions) of most of our major papers most of the time since September 12, 2001. What an unequal contest between the Bush Administration and the press these years have proved. You've had a regime in Washington whose top officials have never hesitated to connect the dots, as they see them, at a global level: who have identified an "arc of instability" stretching from the Andes to the very border of China and from the former Yugoslavia deep into Africa (and largely coinciding with the oil lands of our planet); who have been bolstering military ties and planting bases (from those "enduring camps" in Iraq to new outposts in Central Asia) all along that "arc"; who had a plan, temporarily thwarted by stubborn, completely unexpected resistance in Iraq, to transform the Middle East, felling regimes there, under the rubric of "democracy," like so many bowling pins; who have been visibly organizing a rollback of whatever was left of the former Soviet Union; and who were ready, even eager, to plan and set up a global system of offshore prisons, holding areas and torture camps.

But when was the last time you read a piece of mainstream analysis that actually tried to weave Bush's globe together? Some wonderful reporting can be found in the mainstream press; but it usually remains remarkably unattached, just another in a series of fragments, seldom added up or stitched together. In other words, as we head into George W. Bush's second term, you have the most mobilized Administration in memory and media that have demobilized themselves almost completely.

CALVIN TRILLIN

A Tabloid Reader Responds to Mayor Michael Bloomberg's Announcement That He's Appealing the Decision Making Gay Marriage Legal in New York

Though Mike must do what he thinks right,
A lot of us think it's a pity,
Since we were hoping SpongeBob might
Decide to marry in the city.

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COMMENT

There's a certain irony here. In the cold war years, the press regularly connected the dots to a ridiculous extreme. If labor peeped in Uruguay, or some small group took up arms in Congo, or a pen fell off a desk in Vientiane, Laos, on editorial pages and in articles such events would instantly be connected to the great global cold war between the two nuclear-armed superpowers, the United States and the USSR. Now we find ourselves at another ridiculous extreme, with a press seemingly incapable of noticing that the dots are there, never mind connecting them.

That smallness of thinking was evident in the initial news responses to Seymour Hersh's remarkable January 24/31 *New Yorker* piece, "The Coming Wars." The press jumped on his article and ran with it, based on one piece of information in it—that the Pentagon had reportedly inserted Special Forces units into Iran as part of a program to defang the Iranian nuclear program. It was thus announced as an "Iranian story" and continued as such. But this was visibly a lesser aspect of a startling tale, clearly leaked to Hersh by embittered CIA sources who knew that they had just lost a long-term intrabureaucratic struggle with Donald Rumsfeld's Pentagon. The real story was an accelerating tale of "Pentagon encroachment"—the fact that "the war on terrorism would be expanded and effectively placed under Pentagon control," and that the Pentagon would consider itself free from already modest legal restrictions imposed on the CIA. Put another way, the legal theory that first came to light in the "torture memos" that leaked from White House counsel Alberto Gonzales's office turns out to reach way beyond torture. It wasn't even that Rumsfeld's Pentagon was now to be the armed intelligence and diplomatic spearhead of an ever-more-militarized government but that the President, in his role as "commander in chief," was to be freed of all accountability, all democratic fetters, to order whatever he saw fit.

The press predictably took a big story and ran small—and Hersh, interviewed by Amy Goodman on *Democracy Now!*, indicated as much. The most interesting part of his story, he said, was "not about Iran.... The real issue is that in—what the story is about, is the fact that the diminution of the CIA is unbelievable.... More is totally centralized in the White House and the Pentagon than since the rise of the national security state after World War II in the cold war."

Isn't it strange that month after month in our major papers you could find a story with Iraq but not Iran; Iraq and Iran but not Afghanistan—and certainly not Israel; Afghanistan and Pakistan but not India; and certainly not Iraq, Iran, Israel, Afghanistan, Pakistan and India together, not to speak of a couple of the "stans" of Central Asia, and distant China, although all of them are wound together in complex ways in the thinking and planning of various members of the Bush Administration. Nowhere in the mainstream are you likely to find an article that would even think of linking our new bases in the former Soviet republics of Central Asia to events in Ukraine, or bother to say that the Bush people have long been dreaming feverishly of pushing Russia back to something like its fourteenth-century boundaries—a dream of "rollback" that even in the rabid early 1950s would have seemed slightly mad but is now increasingly a geopolitical reality.

Here's the odd thing: In a world where Gaia—the Earth as a single throbbing organism—is already a cliché; where "globalization" remains a buzz word; and where we happen to be ruled by the greatest geopolitical dreamers and gamblers in our history, our demobilized media treat the world, if at all, as a set of hapless fragments and don't consider puzzling them together to be part of the job description. If you want to grasp our world as it is, you might actually have to click off that TV, use your local paper to wrap the fish and head for the Internet.

TOM ENGELHARDT

Tom Engelhardt, who runs the Nation Institute's Tomdispatch.com ("a regular antidote to the mainstream media"), is the co-founder of Metropolitan Books' The American Empire Project and the author of The End of Victory Culture, *a history of the collapse of US triumphalism in the cold war era. A longer version of this piece appeared at Tomdispatch.com.*

The UN 'Scandal' Report

Conservatives' persistent complaints about the United Nations' alleged lack of transparency are belied by the Interim Report of Paul Volcker's Independent Inquiry Committee into the Oil for Food program. His investigators scoured the hard drives, e-mails and telephone records of UN staff—including those of Secretary General Kofi Annan—and of the private individuals involved. They even went through a cigar box full of business cards belonging to the former head of the program.

In the interests of reciprocal transparency, similar investigative exercises at the Pentagon, the White House, Coalition Provisional Authority offices and Halliburton would be welcome. For there were actually two reports about Iraqi oil money in the same week—Volcker's and that of Stuart Bowen Jr., US Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction, on the fate of the Development Fund for Iraq (DFI). The inspector told Congress that the US occupation administration of Iraq provided "less than adequate controls for approximately $8.8 billion of DFI funds provided to Iraqi ministries through the national budget process" and that there was no way to confirm that the money had been spent in accordance with UN Resolution 1483, which set up the fund.

The inspector's report was released the day of the Iraqi elections and was overlooked by most of the US media. It concluded that the "CPA management of Iraq's national budget process and oversight of Iraqi funds was burdened by severe inefficiencies and poor management." One of the relatively few news stories about the inspector's investigation explained that the DFI was made up of "proceeds from Iraqi oil sales, frozen assets from foreign governments and surplus from the UN Oil-for-Food Program." In fact, more than $8 billion came from the unspent balances from the Oil for Food program. Some of that money went to Halliburton, the company formerly headed by the US Vice President. We have heard no calls in Congress for the investigation of Dick Cheney.

Meanwhile, in New York on February 3, Volcker released his report at an overflowing press conference. The story dominated the headlines for the weekend. Henry Hyde, chair of the House International Relations Committee, responded to Volcker's report, claiming, "I am reluctant to conclude that the UN is damaged be-

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COMIX NATION

MAKING DO

R. O. Blechman

I was once against Big Government.

Just look at that paunch!

But times change.

So look, you adapt.

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JONATHAN SCHELL

Iraq's Unpredictable Politics

Introspection is not the purpose of this occasional column, but a moment of it seems appropriate in the wake of the election recently held in Iraq. That election might have been a blood-soaked fiasco, aborted by insurgent forces. It might have been a nonevent, with sparse turnout and sullen voters. It might have been well attended but still inexpressive and mysterious, a merely formal exercise whose meaning was hard to interpret. But none of these eventualities—which pretty much represented the range of my expectations—transpired. Instead, the election was a full-throated, long-suppressed cry by millions of oppressed and abused people against tyranny, torture, terrorism, penury, anarchy and war, and an ardent appeal for freedom, peace, order and ordinary life.

I had not thought that, two years after Saddam Hussein's fall, such a powerful current of longing could well up. I did not believe that an election with 7,000 candidates, most of whose identities were secret, could inspire such enthusiasm. Above all, I did not believe that so many Iraqis, whose dislike of the American occupation is wide and deep, would seize an opportunity provided in part by that same occupation to express their desires with such clarity and force. On the contrary, I thought that national pride—one of the most powerful forces of modern times—would prevent it.

But express themselves the voters did, with compressed, elemental eloquence. What impressed was not turnout, which remains unknown, especially in Sunni areas; it was the demeanor and comments of those who did vote. A woman in Baghdad explained to the *New York Times*, "A hundred names on the ballot are better than one, because it means that we are free." Another woman in Baghdad said to the *Washington Post*, "We were sad for a long time and this is the first happiness we ever had." The election was a direct, powerfully expressed and articulated rebuke to car-bombers, kidnappers and beheaders. "Enough fear," a woman in Baghdad said. "Let us breathe the air of freedom." A man in Najaf whose father had been killed by Saddam's regime said, "My father helped bring this election today." People brought their children. A man accompanied by his son said, "I expect he will be voting many times." Another man said, "How much those terrorists hate the Iraqis. They were trying to kill us just because we want to do the thing we like to do." Many voters spoke with deep emotion. A man told the *Los Angeles Times*, "I kissed the ballot box." Another said to the *New York Times*, "People have been thirsting for these elections, as if it was a wedding."

There was, I confess, a momentary temptation for someone like me, who has opposed the war from the start and believed it would lead to nothing good, simply to scant the importance of the event, or react to it defensively, or speed past it on the way back to an uneasy confirmation of previous views. But the impulse passed. After all, hadn't I been irked that the war's promoters, including the President, had refused to admit a mistake when they had not found weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, when they had failed to foresee the insurgency that soon broke out after Baghdad was taken, when American forces, encouraged by memos penned at the top levels of the Administration, had committed widespread acts of torture? More important, when masses of ordinary people act with courage to express deep and positive longings, shouldn't one give them their due? But most important of all, wasn't full acknowledgment of the magnitude of the event necessary for any real understanding of what might happen next in Iraq?

The first question for me, therefore, has to be how a decidedly popular election occurred under the auspices of a decidedly unpopular occupation. That unpopularity cannot be doubted. It was manifested in opinion polls (for instance, in May a poll taken by the Coalition Provisional Authority found that 92 percent of Iraqis saw American forces as "occupiers" and only 2 percent saw them as "liberators") but also in the statements of most Iraqi leaders not actually participating in the interim government approved by the occupation. The most significant of them were leaders of the Shiite Muslims, who make up almost two-thirds of the population in Iraq and who came to be represented in the election mainly by the party called the United Iraqi Alliance (UIA). Before the vote, the Shiite leadership's position had been clear: It demanded the withdrawal of American forces after the election. Yet as Trudy Rubin has reported in the *Gulf Times*, the UIA has dropped its demand for a speedy, timed withdrawal, now asking only for "an Iraq which is capable of guaranteeing its security and borders without depending on foreign troops." Iraqi Vice President Ibrahim al-Jaafari, an alliance member, told Rubin, "If the United States pulls out too fast, there would be chaos."

The story of this reversal perhaps began in January 2004, when the spiritual leader of the Shiites, Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, announced his opposition to an indecipherably complex American plan to hold eighteen regional caucuses, which would then choose a national assembly. Sistani demanded direct elections for the assembly instead. He may or may not have been a true believer in democracy, but he certainly understood that in any democratic vote Shiites would win power, reversing several centuries of rule by the Sunni Muslims, who make up only about 20 percent of Iraq's population.

The Bush Administration balked. Sistani insisted. He made a show of strength by summoning hundreds of thousands of Shiites to demonstrations in Basra and Baghdad in support of his plan. He called for an end to the occupation as soon as the vote was held. The demonstrators in Basra chanted, "No, no to conspiracies. No, no to occupation," and "No to America, no to Saddam, no to colonialism." The Bush Administration, afraid of further estranging two-thirds of the population of Iraq, acquiesced.

Having brought the Administration to heel, Sistani next faced a challenge from within Shiite ranks. In spring 2004, the radical cleric Muqtada al-Sadr launched an armed insurrection against the occupation. Sistani stood by while American forces badly

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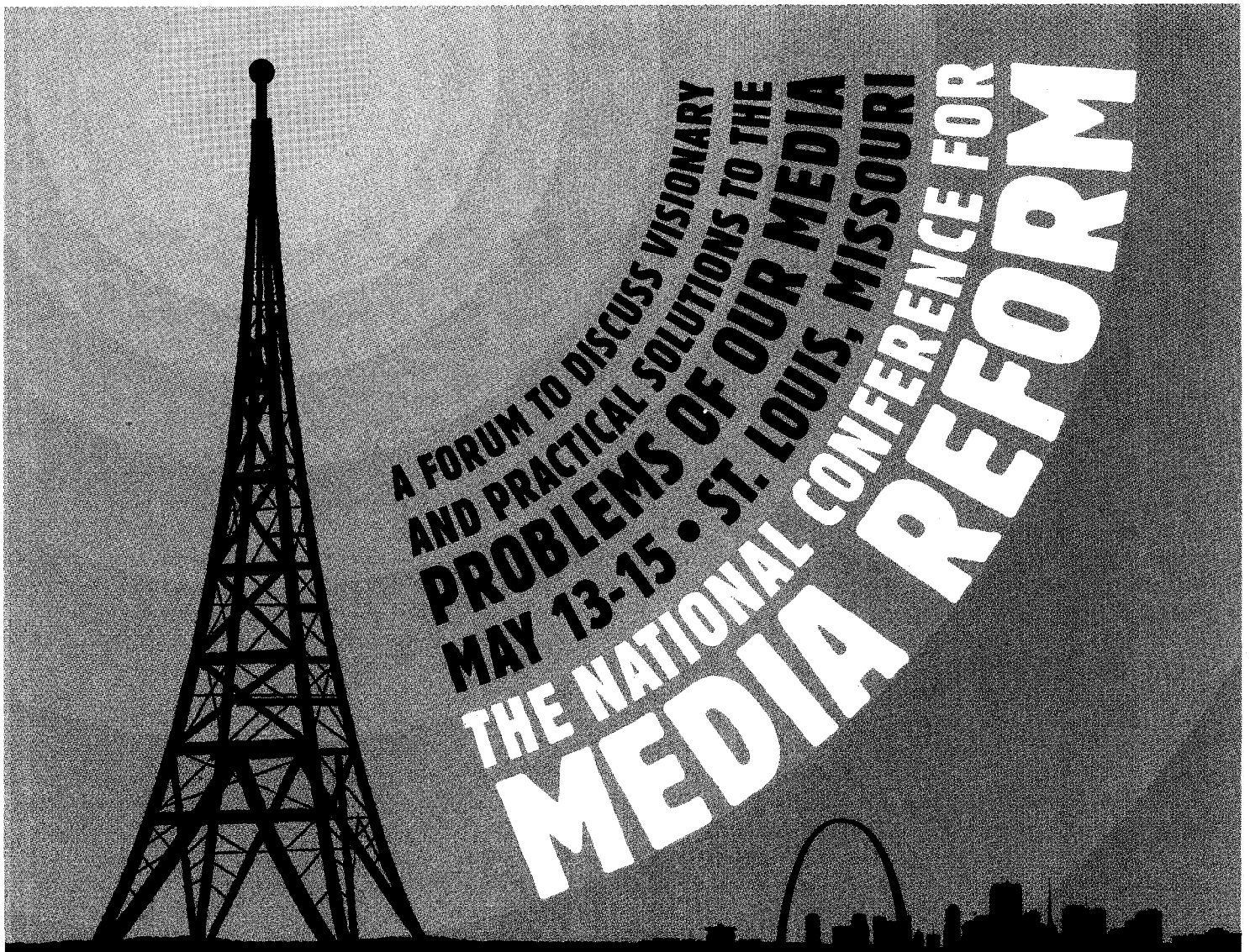
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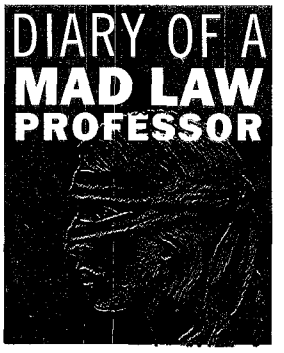
PATRICIA J. WILLIAMS

Power and the Word



A few weeks ago, if you recall, Britain's Prince Harry was having himself a high old time at a Colonials and Natives party to which he came costumed as a Nazi officer. I heard about it on a late-night BBC broadcast and was quite struck by a particularly clueless discussion between two reporters whose names I did not catch. One opined that Harry was wrong to wear Nazi insignia, because in some parts of London, "among the lower classes," such apparel has "real political meaning." The other reporter responded that this was not a matter that divided itself up by class but was rather generational; there were, he said, a lot of people out there "posturing" in the media about how upset they were when they "weren't even alive" during the Holocaust.

The exchange was interesting because it captured rather succinctly some of the carelessness that has tended to permeate the analyses of our own home-grown Prince Harrys. First and most obvious, perhaps, was the assumption that someone of the perpetually off-handed, genially jesting upper classes would not be capable of "real" political expression (even if he is a prince). Yet, presumptively at least, the identical expression from those among the lower classes would be much more ominous and dangerous—for they are presumed to say what they mean and mean what they say. The second reporter's response was just as troubling, with its implication that the only ones entitled to be upset by historical events like the Holocaust were those who went through them. In any event, the flap died down amid royal apologies and general recognitions that life for Harry has been hard; he's a motherless misfit whose frontal cortex, in the manner of adolescent males, has not yet matured to the point where he exercises good judgment.

Switch to this side of the pond. We don't think of ourselves as upper- and lower-class in precisely the same way as the British, but it does seem to me that we privilege power with a kind of unconsciousness that is similar. Consider that panel in San Diego at which Lieut. Gen. James Mattis, commanding general of the Marine Corps Combat Development Command, opined, "Actually, it's a lot of fun to fight. You know, it's a hell of a hoot.... It's fun to shoot some people. I'll be right upfront with you, I like brawling.... You go into Afghanistan. You got guys who slap women around for five years because they didn't wear a veil... you know guys like that ain't got no manhood left anyway. So it's a hell of a lot of fun to shoot them." Mattis, who is "responsible for developing Marine warfighting doctrine, techniques and tactics," is a man with a soft, puppyish, even endearing face very much at visual odds with the brutality of the statement. Indeed, as commander in Iraq he had been generally known for more humane sentiments with which to inspire the troops. Like Prince Harry, Mattis was roundly condemned, but then the letters to the editor started pouring in. Oddly, his very high rank did not seem to be an issue for many people—rather, it became evidence that he surely didn't mean it literally, even as others praised him for "the truth." It was a joke, for heaven's sake, the excusable hyperbole of a seasoned warrior. Like Prince Harry's armband, Mattis's comments were rationalized away by those who accused the media of posturing and of not knowing the first thing about war's reality.

In a letter to the *New York Times*, for example, Michael Close of Anaheim, California, wrote: "I applaud and salute excellent warriors like Lieut. Gen. James Mattis. Soldiers don't have the privilege of choice when it comes to killing in war when ordered to do so. How dare any civil liberties groups or individual pass judgment on how a man separates himself to cope when he is answering the call to aid his country?" Like Prince Harry, the issue became one of "coping" rather than self-discipline.

Meanwhile, over in the groves of academe, Native-American activist Ward Churchill was disinvited from a speaking engagement at Hamilton College because of an essay in which he called the CIA office workers who died in the World Trade Center "little Eichmanns." Not to be outdone, Bill O'Reilly, in a column on his website, called the entire tenure system "a dastardly con that protects teachers for life. They know they can't be fired so they become little Ayatollahs." Calls abounded for Churchill to be fired from his home institution, the University of Colorado, and he has already resigned his chairmanship of the department of ethnic studies. No such fate has been suggested for the powerful, corporate-sponsored O'Reilly.

In this war of words and polemical personalities, there is an increasing privatization of speech. New, well-funded organizations like the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education (FIRE) specifically urge universities to monitor and divest themselves of those engaged in "rank political indoctrination"—which even they rather sheepishly acknowledge is an awfully thin line away from political speech. The model of the university they espouse is not the one envisioned by Louis Brandeis, to whom even open antagonism was a necessary component of civic engagement because "the greatest menace to freedom is an inert people.... The path of safety lies in the opportunity to discuss freely supposed grievances and proposed remedies." These days, the ability to speak has become subject to the whims of a literal rather than metaphorical marketplace. According to FIRE, "voluntary association" is a measure of academic freedom and funding is an "expressive act."

And so we find ourselves in an era when speakers like Michael Moore are spurned by campuses because major donors might get upset and students don't want their funds spent on anything they don't agree with. We seem to have entered a time of shunning that bears a passing strange resemblance to blacklisting. And with that shunning an ethic of "don't listen." "A scholar," says FIRE, "is entitled to shout his ideas from the rooftops, but he or she is not also entitled to do so in front of an audience or to do so while being bankrolled by those who deeply disagree with those ideas." ■

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ERIC ALTERMAN

Better Red Than Dead?

The United States government is currently run by a group of people for whom verifiable truth holds no particular privilege over ideologically inspired nonsense. For members of the mainstream media, trying to maintain a sense of self-importance and solemnity and to keep the wing nuts from crowing for more scalps, this requires a series of stratagems to keep up the scripted charade, no matter how foolish it makes them look or feel while doing so.

The easiest of these stratagems is simply to stack the coverage with political partisans and give them free rein to spout GOP propaganda. That's what the cable news networks do, as Media Matters for America demonstrated. Consistent with cable inauguration coverage, for example, MSNBC offered viewers of its State of the Union commentary eleven right-wing pundits and just two Democrats or liberals in response.

A second technique is more often deployed on network television, where such naked partisanship is frowned upon, but executives are, if anything, even more worried about appearing unsympathetic to the red-state, red-meat offerings of George W. Bush. This is to ignore the substance and focus on the spectacle, the "feelings" and the atmosphere. CBS's Bob Schieffer, on his best post–Dan Rather behavior, for instance, marveled, "One of the best-delivered speeches that I have heard President Bush make. He was confident, he was direct, he drove his points home."

On ABC, Cokie Roberts found herself enthralled with a faux-dramatic—and most likely fully staged—embrace between an Iraqi woman seated next to Laura Bush and the mother of a soldier who died for Bush's folly in Falluja, gushing, "To have that completely spontaneous hug was something that leaves you with goose bumps." Tim Russert—who, like so many Democratic pols who transition to media megabucks, is committed to proving his bona fides by kowtowing to Republicans at every opportunity—professed, "You can feel...in this town" that Democratic "nerves are frayed." Russert was reacting to a rare display of Democratic spirit during the speech—booing when Bush sought to mislead the country into dismantling the most successful government program ever attempted in America: Social Security. To Russert and much of the permanent Washington establishment, the only good Democrat is a dead Democrat—or at least one who's willing to act that way.

The standard for this kind of contentless coverage is set, per usual, by the reporting of the *New York Times*. If the lead reporter of the newspaper of record can ditch the substance part, well then, so can everybody else. Reporter Todd Purdum marveled at Bush's "penchant for thinking big, or speaking grandly." He then referred to Bush's "first State of the Union address three years ago...he stunned the world with his denunciation of Iraq, Iran and North Korea as an 'axis of evil,' and his warning that he would 'not wait on events while dangers gather.'" Purdum failed to note what was obvious to any "reality based" observer: that the "axis" idea was logically incoherent, and the arguments vis-à-vis Iraq were based on evidence later deemed imaginary. Instead, Purdum explained that Bush "has long since proved both the extent, and the limits, of his ability to match his actions to his words," which is an awfully nice way of saying that the man is full of it.

Times editors might have taken a lesson from the *Boston Globe*, a paper with whom they share a common owner, which provided a presidential "fact check" demonstrating Bush's willingness to mislead the nation in the service of his ideological obsessions. In the Knight Ridder newspapers—a chain whose coverage of the leadup to war, by the way, puts to shame that of almost every other paper, particularly that of the *Times*'s credulous correspondent Judith Miller—Kevin G. Hall had the honor and honesty to report that the President was seeking to destroy Social Security on the basis of calculations that were transparently phony. He wrote, "President Bush's warning that Social Security faces a looming financial crisis is based on the assumption that the U.S. economy will grow by only 1.8 percent each year, on average, for most of the next 75 years. Since 1950, the U.S. economy has grown, on average, by 3.5 percent per year." However, he noted, "If the economy continued to grow over the next 50 years at a rate anywhere near the past pace, Social Security wouldn't face a financial crisis, though it would require small adjustments to balance its income and costs." (Perhaps this is the kind of reporting of which the oh-so-smart folks at ABC's *The Note* complain, "Can we stop reading those repetitive, boring, and incomplete journalistic Q&A's on how private accounts would work, blah blah blah, how the system is currently funded, blah blah blah, what the President is proposing, blah blah blah?")

Of course, journalism is by definition a process of selection and omission, so it can be a little unfair to single out what reporters failed to report about Bush's speech. But the unhappy fact is that almost everything this Administration tries to sell to Americans is snake oil, and the mere act of reporting it without comment implicates the media in the fundamental dishonesty that is this President's modus operandi. When he says "freedom," he means the freedom of the United States and its allies to jail and torture anyone they choose. When he says "liberty," he means the liberty of other governments to profess to share the alleged aims of US foreign policy and then—like Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Uzbekistan and Egypt—jail and silence all critics without inconvenient criticism from the United States. (If you play the game right, you can even provide weapons to anti-American terrorists and fund anti-American and anti-Semitic propaganda on behalf of the terrorists, all the while remaining a close friend of Bush & Co.)

This is apparently what NBC's Andrea Mitchell had in mind when she spoke of the Administration's "democracy agenda that Condi Rice is going to be bringing to Europe and the Middle East." Or perhaps she meant an American invasion of Iran; or the destruction of Social Security. It's hard to know in a post-truth society what anything means anymore, except more nonsense and lies, dutifully reported. ■

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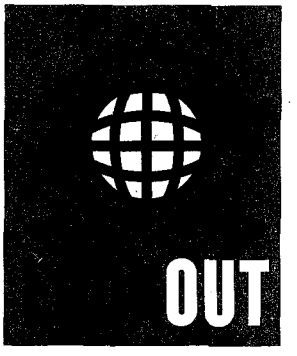
NAOMI KLEIN

Getting the Purple Finger

"The Iraqi people gave America the biggest 'thank you' in the best way we could have hoped for." Reading this election analysis from Betsy Hart, a columnist for the Scripps Howard News Service, I found myself thinking about my late grandmother. Half blind and a menace behind the wheel of her Chevrolet, she adamantly refused to surrender her car keys. She was convinced that everywhere she drove (flattening the house pets of Philadelphia along the way) people were waving and smiling at her. "They are so friendly!" We had to break the bad news. "They aren't waving with their whole hand, Grandma—just with their middle finger."



So it is with Betsy Hart and the other near-sighted election observers: They think the Iraqi people have finally sent America those long-awaited flowers and candies, when Iraq's voters just gave them the (purple) finger.

The election results are in: Iraqis voted overwhelmingly to throw out the US-installed government of Iyad Allawi, who refused to ask the United States to leave. A decisive majority voted for the United Iraqi Alliance; the second plank in the UIA platform calls for "a timetable for the withdrawal of the multinational forces from Iraq."

There are more single-digit messages embedded in the winning coalition's platform. Some highlights: "Adopting a social security system under which the state guarantees a job for every fit Iraqi... and offers facilities to citizens to build homes." The UIA also pledges "to write off Iraq's debts, cancel reparations and use the oil wealth for economic development projects." In short, Iraqis voted to repudiate the radical free-market policies imposed by former chief US envoy Paul Bremer and locked in by a recent agreement with the International Monetary Fund.

So will the people who got all choked up watching Iraqis flock to the polls support these democratically chosen demands? Please. "You don't set timetables," George W. Bush said four days after Iraqis voted for exactly that. Likewise, British Prime Minister Tony Blair called the elections "magnificent" but dismissed a firm timetable out of hand. The UIA's pledges to expand the public sector, keep the oil and drop the debt will likely suffer similar fates. At least if Adel Abd al-Mahdi gets his way—he's Iraq's finance minister and the man suddenly being touted as leader of Iraq's next government.

Al-Mahdi is the Bush Administration's Trojan horse in the UIA. (You didn't think they were going to put all their money on Allawi, did you?) In October he told a gathering of the American Enterprise Institute that he planned to "restructure and privatize [Iraq's] state-owned enterprises," and in December he made another trip to Washington to unveil plans for a new oil law "very promising to the American investors." It was al-Mahdi himself who oversaw the signing of a flurry of deals with Shell, BP and ChevronTexaco in the weeks before the elections, and it is he who negotiated the recent austerity deal with the IMF. On troop withdrawal, al-Mahdi sounds nothing like his party's platform and instead appears to be channeling Dick Cheney on Fox News: "When the Americans go will depend on when our own forces are ready and on how the resistance responds after the elections." But on Sharia law, we are told, he is very close to the clerics.

Iraq's elections were delayed time and time again, while the occupation and resistance grew ever more deadly. Now it seems that two years of bloodshed, bribery and backroom arm-twisting were leading up to this: a deal in which the ayatollahs get control over the family, Texaco gets the oil, and Washington gets its enduring military bases (call it the "oil for women program"). Everyone wins except the voters, who risked their lives to cast their ballots for a very different set of policies.

But never mind that. January 30, we are told, was not about what Iraqis were voting for—it was about the fact of their voting and, more important, how their plucky courage made Americans feel about *their* war. Apparently, the elections' true purpose was to prove to Americans that, as George Bush put it, "the Iraqi people value their own liberty." Stunningly, this appears to come as news. Chicago *Sun-Times* columnist Mark Brown said the vote was "the first clear sign that freedom really may mean something to the Iraqi people." On *The Daily Show*, CNN's Anderson Cooper described it as "the first time we've sort of had a gauge of whether or not they're willing to sort of step forward and do stuff."

This is some tough crowd. The Shiite uprising against Saddam in 1991 was clearly not enough to convince them that Iraqis were willing to "do stuff" to be free. Nor was the demonstration of 100,000 people held one year ago demanding immediate elections, or the spontaneous local elections organized by Iraqis in the early months of the occupation—both summarily shot down by Bremer. It turns out that on American TV, the entire occupation has been one long episode of *Fear Factor*, in which Iraqis overcome ever-more-challenging obstacles to demonstrate the depths of their desire to win their country back. Having their cities leveled, being tortured in Abu Ghraib, getting shot at checkpoints, having their journalists censored and their water and electricity cut off—all of it was just a prelude to the ultimate endurance test: dodging bombs and bullets to get to the polling station. At last, Americans were persuaded that Iraqis really, really want to be free.

So what's the prize? An end to occupation, as the voters demanded? Don't be silly—the US government won't submit to any "artificial timetable." Jobs for everyone, as the UIA promised? You can't vote for socialist nonsense like that. No, they get Geraldo Rivera's tears ("I felt like such a sap"), Laura Bush's motherly pride ("It was so moving for the President and me to watch people come out with purple fingers") and Betsy Hart's sincere apology for ever doubting them ("Wow—do I stand corrected").

And that should be enough. Because if it weren't for the invasion, Iraqis would not even have the freedom to vote for their liberation, and then to have that vote completely ignored. And that's the real prize: the freedom to be occupied. Wow—do I stand corrected. ■

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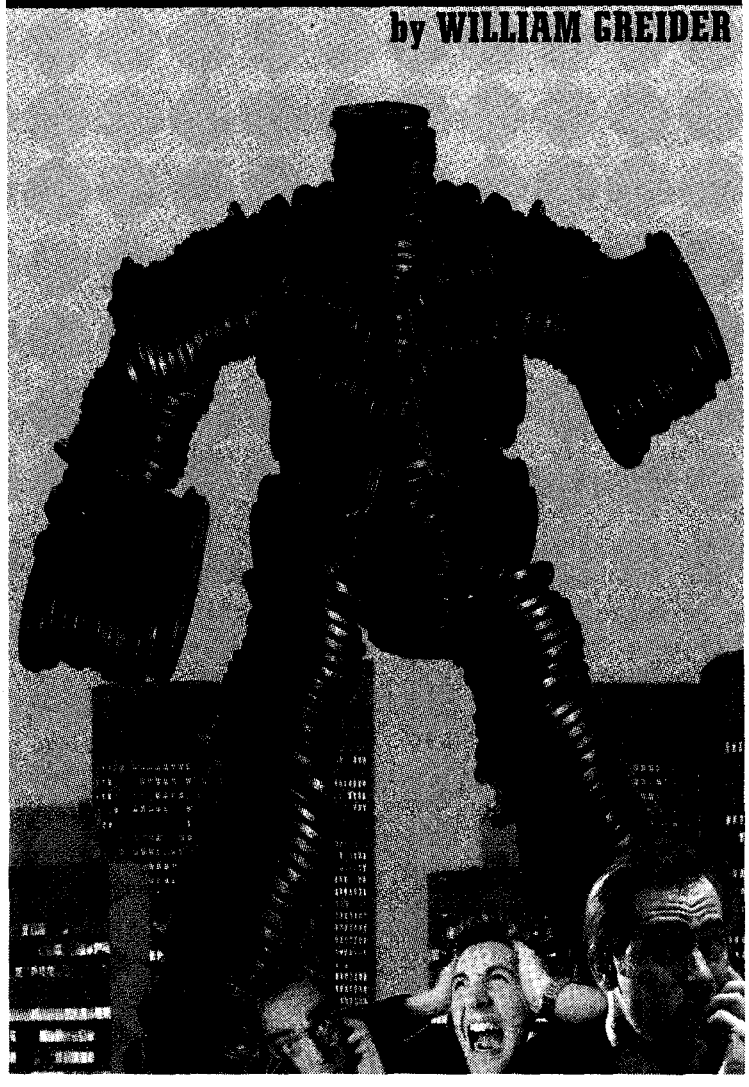
ARTICLES

The New Colossus

by WILLIAM GREIDER



The New Politics of Capital

While dispirited Democrats stew over their party's uncertain future, they might check out an unusual cluster of progressive "activists" forming within their ranks. Some politicians with real muscle are pursuing far-ranging possibilities for reforming the economic system. Their potential for driving important change is not widely recognized, perhaps because the reformers are drawn from unglamorous backbenches of state government—treasurers, comptrollers, pension-fund trustees. Yet these state officials, unlike the minority Democrats in Congress, have decision-making power and control over enormous pools of investment capital. They are fiduciaries who manage the vast wealth stored by state governments in public-employee pension funds, invested in behalf of working people—civil servants, teachers and other types of public workers—who as future retirees are "beneficial owners" of the capital.

In the wake of Enron-style corporate scandals, in which public pension funds lost more than $300 billion, some of the leading funds have restyled themselves as more aggressive reformers. They are picking fights with Wall Street orthodoxy they long accepted, like the obsessive maximizing of short-term gains. More important, they are broadening their definition of fiduciary obligations to retirees by trying to enforce corporate responsibilities to serve society's long-term prospects. Instead of adhering passively to market dogma, the activist funds now regularly accuse corporate managements and major financial houses of negligently or willfully injuring the long-term interests of pension-fund investors, therefore injuring the economy and society, too. Pension-fund wealth is thus being mobilized as financial leverage to break up the narrow-minded thinking of finance capital and to confront the antisocial behavior of corporations.

The core players in this struggle are the largest and most progressive pension funds in the nation—anchored by blue-state constituencies in California and New York. The heavyweights are occasionally joined by a handful of smaller states like Connecticut, North Carolina, Iowa and a few others where pension officials are kindred spirits. Together and individually, their efforts are possibly the only reform impulse ascendant among Democrats. Party leaders trying to rethink strategies could learn a lot from these state-level officials (and come to their political defense, if they had the nerve). "We're thirty-year investors and we have to take the long view," California Treasurer Phil Angelides explains. "I believe one of the things that led to the corruption of recent years was this notion that infected America that wealth is somehow created in six to nine months and all that matters is whether this quarter's returns are better than last quarter's—not whether you are building companies and products and an economy that will have enduring value."

His resonant phrase—"enduring value"—effectively summarizes the reform objective. The reformers understand that the current laissez-faire, let-'er-rip system damages important social values—equitable treatment of workers, the environment and other commonly shared public assets—and that both workers and retirees (and the state taxpayers who put up the money for public pension funds) have a strong self-interest, personal as well as financial, in husbanding the distant future: a healthy society and strong economy for themselves and their families.

The best evidence that the reform-minded pension funds are onto something—maybe something big—is the fierce and nasty counterattack launched by business and financial interests. Last

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spring, the Business Roundtable, the US Chamber of Commerce and the American Enterprise Institute began a simultaneous barrage of complaints and name-calling accusations (faithfully echoed by the *Wall Street Journal* and *Forbes*). State pension officials, they warned, are departing dangerously from their fiduciary duties, putting "social issues" first and becoming pawns of organized labor. AEI's economic-policy director claimed CalPERS (the mammoth California Public Employees' Retirement System) "is abusing the public trust in a manner as serious and grave as any I have seen. They have a pool of money controlled by politicians and they are using that pool to strong-arm changes in targeted companies."

Why California Matters

CalPERS is the largest pension fund in the nation, holding $180 billion, and it is indeed trying to "strong-arm" companies—scores of them—into making reforms. Angelides has become a favorite target of the corporate critics—and a visible point man for pension-fund activism—because he sits on the boards of both CalPERS and CalSTRS (California State Teachers Retirement System), the country's second-largest, with holdings of another $125 billion. Angelides has pushed both funds to adopt a whirlwind of reforms—dumping tobacco stocks, blacklisting ten "emerging markets" that ignore international labor standards, redeploying capital to neglected sectors like inner-city redevelopment and innovative environmental technologies, and, above all, peppering scores of corporations, banks, brokerages, financial markets and federal regulators with critiques and demands for change.

Angelides has only one vote among the numerous board members at each pension fund, but he regularly prevails because his partner in reform is organized labor. Sean Harrigan, the regional director of the United Food and Commercial Workers, was, until very recently, the CalPERS board president. Alert elements in labor—unions led principally by the Service Employees (SEIU) and State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME)—are closely involved, mobilizing grassroots support and lobbying the policy-makers. Harrigan and Angelides have collected a lot of enemies, one might say, in all the right places. "The old holders of capital—the old status quo—are very nervous about this discussion of capital and the larger context of what's good for the economy," Angelides warns. "They don't want these questions asked. They don't want the old order to be changed. They want to control capital and they want to control it to their benefit, not to the larger economy's."

Harrigan tried to downplay the conflict, suggesting the trustees were simply advocating "corporate governance" improvements, as they have done for years, to better align corporate managements with the interests of the corporate shareholders. "We think we are having an impact on the marketplace and influencing the way companies behave, at least on the margins," Harrigan told me. "There's been some marginal progress—that's all it is."

His opponents, it became clear, did not buy bland reassurances. In early December Harrigan was abruptly ousted from his position—whacked through an obscure maneuver at the State Personnel Board that reformers attributed to business-financial lobbyists allied with right-wing Republicans and assisted by Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger. The governor denied any role, but he followed up a few weeks later by proposing legislation to begin breaking up CalPERS into private personalized accounts similar to 401(k)s, thus dispersing its financial power and diluting its ability to exercise reform leverage.

What had been remote skirmishes over esoteric financial rules suddenly became a very visible political fight. To Angelides, the collision was fundamental and inevitable. "Look," he says, "in the course of a reform movement, you are going to rattle some cages and upset some people who have power. But if you're not willing to do that, what good are you as a reformer?"

Neither the treasurer nor his colleagues on the two pension-fund boards appear to be backing away from the fight. Two weeks after Harrigan was dumped, CalPERS trustees adopted another new labor-backed investment policy, this time against investing in corporations that profit by privatization of public services and jobs. "We are just beginning to have an impact on the ethos, the thinking, the culture in corporate America and the financial markets," Angelides says. "Why would we stop now? Not on my watch, we're not."

Building on the Past

The current wave of pension-fund reformers is building upon shareholder activism pioneered thirty years ago by churches and other social activists, most famously in the campaign to end apartheid in South Africa. The shareholder-petition movement continues to grow and exert influence, but has always suffered from an essential weakness: Under existing rules, CEOs and boards of directors are free to ignore the dissidents, even when their policy proposals draw overwhelming support from other shareholders. Many managements do decide to be responsive, if only for good public relations. But the vision of pension-fund power has never been fully realized. These new activists might conceivably be different.

For one thing, the state funds have grown enormously in financial girth. Fiduciary institutions in general (including mutual funds, corporate pension funds and some others) are now the majority owners of the 1,000 largest US companies and collectively Wall Street's largest customer. The new strategies also seem more systematically focused because the public pension funds are not distant critics promoting broad principles of "socially responsible" behavior but major owners asking boards of directors tough and precise balance-sheet questions. Organized labor's active engagement also promises a much stronger base of popular support for reform ideas. So far, the collaborations among the progressive funds have brought together as much as $700 billion to support a corporate-governance issue, with a prospect of far greater firepower if other state pension funds join the cause (nationwide, public funds hold about $2.7 trillion and union-managed funds have another $400 billion).

The coalescence of labor and environmental activism is visible on an issue stalemated in regular politics—global warming. The overseers of around $800 billion in investor wealth have endorsed the Investor Network on Climate Risk, a coalition of pension funds with church-based, environmentalist and other like-minded shareholder activists led by Connecticut Treasurer Denise Nap-

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pier. The coalition is methodically engaging major corporations in the oil, auto and electric-utility sectors, which are the leading US sources of carbon emissions—that is, global warming. The strategy is beginning to win some meaningful admissions of corporate exposure to financial risks (more about this later).

Other initiatives have led to swift and bloody conflicts. New York State Comptroller Alan Hevesi, a gray, subdued figure alongside Angelides, brings another $121 billion to the table as the single manager of the New York State Common Retirement Fund, third-largest in the nation. Other regulars include William Thompson Jr., who runs the New York City pension funds (more than $80 billion), and North Carolina Treasurer Richard Moore ($63 billion). Last fall Hevesi scored against Sinclair Broadcasting, which intended to televise a nasty propaganda film attacking John Kerry in the guise of "news." As a substantial shareholder, Hevesi objected; Sinclair backed down. Hevesi recently won an important corporate-accountability precedent in his fund's investor lawsuit against fraud-riddled WorldCom. Ten former directors of the collapsed telecom company agreed to pay $18 million out of their own pockets rather than risk further exposure to fraud accusations. A year ago Angelides scored a bull's-eye when he demanded the resignation of Richard Grasso, the grossly overpaid president of the New York Stock Exchange. Other pension leaders jumped aboard. Grasso was gone the next day.

The Spitzer Factor

These officials draw inspiration from the stunning reform victories won by New York State Attorney General Eliot Spitzer, who has blistered financiers and corporate moguls with his continuing exposures of scandal. When Spitzer demanded and won reformed operating rules from Merrill Lynch, the pension-fund leaders embraced the principles and applied them as their own new rules for the banks and financial houses handling their money. More recently, Spitzer exposed a bid-rigging scandal in the insurance industry. Four pension funds, led by AFSCME, nominated an independent director for the board of Marsh & McLennan and the firm accepted him—a former federal prosecutor now collaborating with the AG on reforms.

Spitzer intends to run for New York governor in 2006. Angelides intends to do the same in California (though his prospects were dimmed by the abrupt rise of Gov. Arnold). The two men can be seen as representative figures, since each is trying to revive an important dimension of the reform tradition their party has virtually abandoned. Like the earlier Progressives, Spitzer seeks to tame the abuses and excesses of American capitalism, using inventive approaches and toughness (who else is taking on his home state's most powerful industry?). Angelides is more like a New Dealer—an economic liberal who seeks to transform the system more deeply. He boldly espouses basic principles of economic liberalism (and forgotten principles of sound investing) without apology.

With both Spitzer and Angelides running in 2006, Democrats will hear from aggressive campaigns that could provide building blocks for regenerating a reform-minded party. Angelides, for instance, articulates—actually resurrects—old wisdom about the nature of economic development. Public investment and private enterprise are not at war with each other, as the right has taught

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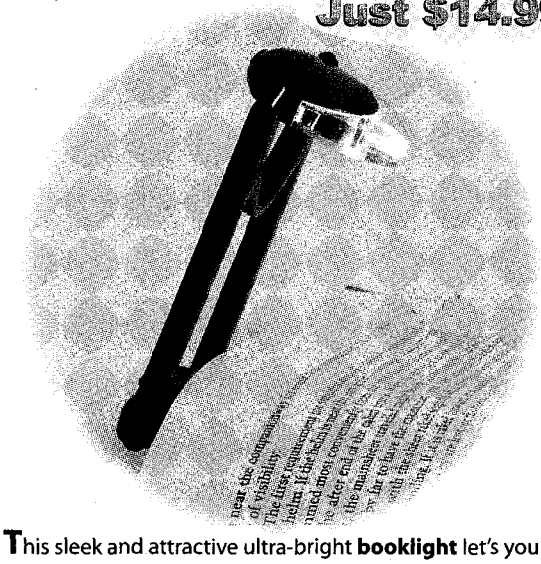

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people to believe. They are mutually reinforcing and the key to insuring equitable opportunities for all (if you doubt this, check out the history of the world's sixth-largest economy—California).

If Democrats looked more closely at the issues that Spitzer-Angelides bring to corporate governance, they would find a powerful rebuke to George W. Bush's loose talk about "democracy" and the "ownership society." While Bush calls for democracy worldwide, he is smothering the ownership rights of corporate shareowners at home. In behalf of business-financial elites, the White House has bullied Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) chairman William Donaldson (a GOP financier himself) for favoring the proposal to allow major institutional investors like public pension funds to nominate independent directors to corporate boards. If that proposal is killed, as appears likely, reformers led by the Carpenters Union will be pushing a more direct initiative at the corporations: requiring that directors and CEOs who run unopposed at least win with majority support from the shareholders. How radical is that? Too radical for the status quo's moguls and titans. They know that majority rule would allow a broad coalition of institutional investors to withhold their votes and veto entrenched managements.

A Way to Talk About Power

Converting obscure financial issues into broadly understood political issues requires deft translation, but will speak to a very broad audience of abused Americans. It's a way to talk about excessive corporate power—a major public concern, according to polls, yet seldom mentioned—with concrete examples rather than abstractions.

Labor seems to understand the potential politics better than most. Numerous unions are getting engaged, and a few have committed real resources to organizing and educating. Now some fifty AFSCME members are pension trustees around the country. SEIU has a staff of ten field organizers nationwide who stay close to pension boards and the relevant elections. Together, the two unions backed a librarian elected by co-workers to Ohio's retirement board, gaining a 5-to-4 majority at the $65 billion fund. Three new labor-friendly members were elected in New Mexico, two more in Maryland.

Oddly enough, this small-d democratic brand of politics is well suited to the daunting realm of finance capital. At its best, organizing is about building "relationships with power," and Wall Street itself functions daily on the power relationships among major financial players—the people who make the deals and decide who gets what, who's in charge, whose values will be reflected in how a company operates. The problem is, the millions of workers who, collectively, are major corporate shareowners do not get a seat at the table appropriate to their wealth. (The same orphaned status applies to most small investors, who turn over their savings to mutual funds that proceed to ignore their interests.) Creating trustworthy financial intermediaries that speak reliably for their clients is a fundamental reform in itself.

In this convergence of rising politicians and activist elements, are we glimpsing the vanguard of a new kind of reform politics? My answer is: yes, maybe. This reform impulse is different because it seeks to change the system from within, using workers' capital as the driving wedge. Yet it is also traditionally liberal in that the latter-day reformers seek to leverage government's regulatory system and build popular support for new and stronger regulatory legislation (though not yet in Washington).

Thinking Like a Capitalist

The largest public pension funds, including CalPERS, have always been conflicted in their obligations to workers and retirees. They are supposed to invest only in the "best interests" of their beneficial owners, which traditionally has meant seeking the best financial returns. But they have often seemed to be playing for the other side—trashing the environment, workers and communities, and cutting costs in ways that undermine long-term economic prospects. Dennak Murphy, a West Coast organizer for SEIU, crisply explains: "We have nearly 800,000 members, most of whom are in public employee retirement funds [including 210,000 in CalPERS]. The pension funds take their money and buy stocks in two or three thousand companies. Then a lot of those companies turn around and screw the workers."

No other major investors in finance capital would tolerate such abuse for long—they would dump the stocks and perhaps plot retaliation. Pension-fund managers are expected to look the other way and accept collateral damage to their members as unavoidable on the grounds that diversification—spreading their investments across the entire stock market and effectively owning the broad economy—reduces their risk. Passivity does not protect them from horrendous losses, however. CalPERS lost $586 million on WorldCom alone.

Grossly oversimplified, the reform strategy is guided by two interacting principles: First, pension funds should invest to restore the once-common understanding that, in the long run, you can't have a successful economy and a failing society (roughly speaking, that's what the "market ideology" ignores). Second, while pension funds adopt this perspective to advance the self-interest of their members (including long-term financial soundness), they should also use their leverage to make the financial system incorporate these principles as the system's operating routines.

If the happy day ever arrives when the financial system itself recognizes and reinforces the values of long-term investing, miscreant corporations will be punished in terms they can readily understand: falling stock prices and higher costs on their borrowing. Stock-market analysts will then have to calculate what they now routinely ignore—the long-term economic consequences of social destruction—and investors will learn to prefer shares in healthy companies. The marketplace, in effect, will have the information to "mark down" bad guys and reward managements that are truly forward-looking. That, at least, is the vision.

Angelides is familiar with the accounting fallacies of capitalism because he's a capitalist himself, a developer and investor who made his fortune in California real estate. "I would make the case—this comes from my experience in real estate—that the best, most highly regarded companies are the ones that are profitable and also produce products that are of utility to society, that increase our productivity and enrich our lives," he says. "When people step back and ask what they most want to see in the private sector, it is both profitability and good results for society. There is no reason capital shouldn't be held to the same standard."

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Angelides led a tough, two-year fight to persuade CalPERS and CalSTRS to dump tobacco company stocks from their portfolios, but he prevailed on hard facts of investor risk, not social sentiment. "We worked day and night to lay out the risks to the companies—the increasing regulatory climate, the increasing lawsuits the companies would face," he recalls. "It wasn't simply that we don't like tobacco."

Acknowledging Risks to Society

Yet when even the largest pension fund withdraws its capital from antisocial companies, they are unlikely to feel the sting. For genuine muscle, the reformers will have to generate a market-wide reaction to their critiques—with many investors, large and small, shunning the companies. That's why activists are working to accomplish their second strategic principle: convincing the governing institutions of the financial system to acknowledge that society's risks are also financial risks and that these factors should be made standard elements in evaluating corporate worth.

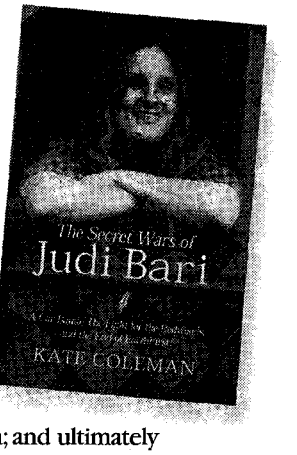
Confronting industrial producers of carbon emissions, the Investor Network on Climate Risk follows this logic systematically. Connecticut Treasurer Nappier, who leads the network, explains: "My basic premise is that by being an activist I can add value to the companies, not just by the integrity of their financial accounting but on issues we refer to as 'sustainable governance,' like the environment, treatment of workers, diversity in the workforce and on corporate boards. Climate change will affect the long-term value of the companies and therefore our pension-fund portfolio."

The investor network filed shareholder petitions with twenty-five corporations—the big names in oil, autos, electric utilities—asking them to disclose their risk exposure on global warming, then to explain how the companies intend to avoid the potential losses. Last fall, American Electric Power, the largest coal-burning utility and therefore the largest US generator of carbon emissions, startled the industry by responding forthrightly. It not only acknowledged the reality of global warming's threat to the world and its own risk exposure but also predicted that US controls on carbon emissions are likely in the next decade and spelled out its capital investment plans to begin reducing emissions. AEP had rejected previous petitions. Why did it respond this time? "They asked a reasonable question that had an answer," said AEP director Robert Fri. "What would be the economic impact to the nation's largest coal-burning utility? The answer is a lot." Other utilities, like Cinergy, followed with similar reports. In oil, ChevronTexaco and several smaller companies got religion too. In autos, Ford prepared a lame promise to make big changes by 2030.

The noose of global warming is tightening on US industry, as the Kyoto Protocol enters active enforcement. The global reinsurance firm Swiss Re has warned its corporate clients to come up with strategies for global warming or risk losing their liability coverage. The Association of British Insurers warns that "businesses responsible for high emissions of greenhouse gases could be held liable for the damage that is caused by climate change."

CERES, the environmental coalition that does strategy and research for Nappier's network, explains that the business risks go further than lawsuits and regulation. Electric utilities that build new power plants without incorporating carbon reductions may

A CAR BOMB AND THE FIGHT FOR THE REDWOODS



In 1990, a car bomb in Oakland almost killed the legendary Earth First! leader, Judi Bari.

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find they have misused billions in capital and are stuck with obsolete plants. Auto companies that continue to resist the transformation to nonpetroleum cars will lose market share to forward-thinking competitors like Toyota. Energy firms that ignore renewable sources are missing future business opportunities. These sectors might someday find they are the next tobacco industry, facing billions in damage lawsuits, insurance costs and capital losses. Yet most corporations still do not mention global warming in their quarterly disclosures of "material risk." Are they misleading shareholders? Thirteen pension funds have petitioned the SEC to require all companies to disclose these hidden risks.

Meanwhile, the drive to inject these issues into the financial system's formal rules is already under way. In essence, the "social screens" pioneered by "socially responsible investor" funds—excluding rogue products and companies from the portfolio—would be reformulated to market standards. Nappier has promoted the development of an alternative Standard & Poor's 500 index, alongside the existing one, that would include only companies actively committed to sustainable economics. A rival S&P index could deliver serious injury to the stock prices of companies that get kicked out of the "white hat" 500.

Since the risk-rating agencies also failed utterly to alert investors to scores of fraudulent corporations in the recent wave of business scandals, they too are becoming more sensitive to the reform critique. Social issues do affect returns. Contrary to market lore, the accumulated evidence shows that the best-managed and least socially destructive companies also perform better in the stock market than "low road" rivals in the same sector.

Major pension funds, in the end, will still need to diversify their holdings, but diversification can be done more astutely than passive indexed investing that simply buys stocks across the market without making any distinctions. The CalPERS professional staff is designing an experimental index that reflects the overall economy but leaves out companies with a record of high risks and price volatility—factors typically accompanied by negative behavior on "social issues." If this proves successful, CalPERS will have invented a new investment model that other funds can adopt. Angelides also envisions "actions of consequence" for truly notorious corporate behavior. "If there are recalcitrants," he suggests, "you kick them out of the index."

The reformers will get no help from Washington. The Bush Administration clearly stands with the CEOs, who whine about the burdens of complying with the new, rather modest reform regulations. On the other hand, the stock market is still sick, limping sideways for the last three years because investor distrust remains strong. Angelides likes to point out that after the crash of 1929, it took the stock market twenty-five years to regain its old peak.

Democrats have a political opportunity in this situation. They can rally around reformers and build popular support for their social-economic agenda. Or they can remain quiet so as not to offend very powerful corporate-financial interests. Their choice may tell us something about the party's future. ■

HER VOTES THRILLED SUPPORTERS AND PUT SOME BACKBONE INTO SENATE DEMOCRATS.

The Boxer Rebellion

JOHN NICHOLS

RICHARD BECKERMAN

It was the night of Barbara Boxer's greatest political victory. She had been re-elected to a third term as a senator from California, beating a credible challenger by a twenty-point margin and securing a higher raw vote total—6.9 million—than any federal candidate save George W. Bush and John Kerry. But Boxer's party was in trouble. Democrats had failed to retake the White House and lost seats in Congress, and a decade after the GOP revolution of 1994 put both the House and Senate in Republican hands, the party that had for so long ruled Congress still did not seem to understand how to mount an effective opposition. "On election night," Boxer recalls, "I said that I knew there were hard and tough times coming and that if I had to stand alone, I was going to do it. I'm not going to worry about what other people are doing. I'm going to be comfortable with being the only vote."

To anyone unfamiliar with the continuing crisis of the contemporary Democratic Party—which, for the past decade, has been exacerbated by the supine character of its Congressional caucuses—Boxer's statement might have sounded bizarre. Sure, things look bad for Democrats, but the party still has a substantial caucus in the Senate. So why would she be talking about standing alone? The answer is that Boxer, a liberal who shares the view of many grassroots Democrats that their party's fortunes will be renewed only by showing strength, was implicitly acknowledging the reality that a lot of Congressional Democrats still don't recognize: that Democrats have to become a genuine opposition party before they can ever again hope to become a majority party.

Barely two months after she made her go-it-alone pledge, the Senator would illustrate that point—perhaps unintentionally, but certainly effectively—when she lodged one of the most high-profile dissents in the history of the Senate. Inspired by electoral justice activists, who, she says, "definitely put the issue on the agenda for me," and by conversations with Representative Stephanie Tubbs Jones, a Cleveland Democrat who was concerned about the disenfranchisement of minority voters in Ohio, Boxer objected to the certification of the presidential election results from that state. Boxer's objection forced a two-hour debate that saw several Senate Democrats making pious statements about the need to count

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every vote, but she alone voted against certification.

Boxer's move thrilled Democrats outside Washington—thirty bouquets arrived at her office afterward—but it did not meet with enthusiasm from her Democratic colleagues. Senate minority leader Harry Reid reportedly worried that Boxer's move would paint Democrats as sore losers. Senator Mark Dayton, usually a reliable liberal, dismissed the challenge as "seriously misguided." Press coverage focused more on the tear Boxer shed as she talked about disenfranchised minority voters than on the compelling evidence of the denial of democracy. White House spokesman Scott McClellan announced, "It is time to move forward and not engage in conspiracy theories or partisan politics of this nature." But Boxer didn't back off.

Less than two weeks later, she turned a Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearing on Condoleezza Rice's nomination as Secretary of State into an unprecedented debate about the Administration's manipulation of intelligence data regarding Iraq. Recalling Rice's suggestion that Saddam Hussein might launch a nuclear weapon against America, resulting in a "mushroom cloud," Boxer told Rice, "That image had to frighten every American into believing that Saddam Hussein was on the verge of annihilating them if he was not stopped. And I will be placing into the record a number of such statements you made which have not been consistent with the facts." So tough—and on the mark—was Boxer's attack that it inspired *Saturday Night Live* regular Amy Poehler to portray the chart-toting legislator confronting Rice with a bar graph contrasting a stubby line representing "the truth" with a long bold line for "what you say." (Boxer loved it.)

Asked if she thinks that her questioning of Rice got fellow Democrats off their duffs, Boxer replies, 'Absolutely.'

And this time other Democrats paid attention to her objections. Senator Robert Byrd blocked Senate action on the nomination, upsetting White House plans to swear in Rice on Inauguration Day. That set up a heated debate on the nomination and the truthfulness of the Administration. Rice was confirmed, but a dozen senators, including Byrd, Edward Kennedy and Dick Durbin, the new minority whip, joined what has come to be known as the Boxer Rebellion.

Asked if she thinks that her questioning of Rice got fellow Democrats off their duffs, Boxer replies, "Absolutely." Noting that Rice got thirteen No votes, she says, "That's the most votes cast against a Secretary of State nominee since 1825." She adds, "I think it's a very powerful statement, even though to the outsider it doesn't look like much. This is very unusual, and it sends a strong message to the Administration that we are going to be carefully watching their statements and their policies."

Boxer got Republicans exercised. House majority leader Tom DeLay referred to the Senator indirectly as the spokesperson for the "X-Files wing" of the Democratic Party, while Fox's Bill O'Reilly labeled her "a nut." But grassroots Democrats were ecstatic to witness some fire from a Democrat in Washington. "Boxer for President" talk lit up the Internet, and when Boxer walked into parties and fundraising events around the country she was greeted with standing ovations. "More than anyone in the Senate right now, she is satisfying the hunger that so many grassroots activists feel to see someone stand up to this Administration," says Ralph Neas, president of People for the American Way. And Boxer, to a far greater extent than most Democratic senators, relishes her relationship with the grassroots.

Perhaps it is because that's where she comes from. While much is made of the students who got "Clean for Gene" when Minnesota Senator Eugene McCarthy waged an antiwar challenge to President Lyndon Johnson in the Democratic primaries of 1968, the backbone of the McCarthy campaign was actually young mothers. Boxer, who had recently moved from her native New York to the San Francisco Bay Area, was one of them. And like so many who got energized during that turbulent year, she remained in the fray—campaigning for a local antiwar referendum, building an influential environmental and antiwar group known as Marin Alternative, editing an alternative newspaper and winning a county board seat in 1976. Six years later, after her election to a Bay Area House seat, she arrived in Washington with all of her activist edge. It was Boxer who in 1984 earned national headlines and reforms in Defense Department procurement policies by revealing that the Air Force had spent $7,622 for a coffee pot. And it was Boxer who in 1991 marched House women to the Senate to demand a serious examination of sexual harassment charges against Supreme Court nominee Clarence Thomas.

The next year she was elected to the Senate. But at least in her first two terms, her edge seemed to be blunted. Even Boxer's fans admit she was more a conventional liberal than a bold dissenter. *San Francisco Bay Guardian* executive editor Tim Redmond, who thinks Boxer worried too much about her 1998 and 2004 reelection prospects after a close race in 1992, sums up a common complaint about her caution on issues ranging from the Patriot Act, which she supported, to San Francisco Mayor Gavin Newsom's gay-marriage initiative, which she criticized, when he says, "In her first two terms, she voted right, but she wasn't the leader that everyone knew she could have been."

Now that Boxer looks like a leader, there is a struggle to explain the shift. Predictably, there are suggestions that she has either decided to grab the spotlight in order to position herself for a presidential run or decided that, as this may well be her last term, she has nothing to lose. Boxer is dismissive of talk about running for President. "Not everybody in the Senate wants to be President," she says. "A few of us like being senators." The fact that she is an in-law of undeclared 2008 Democratic front-runner Hillary Clinton lends credibility to Boxer's declaration—although if Clinton isn't the nominee, watch for Boxer's name on vice-presidential short lists. And, though she entertained the notion of standing down in 2004 before DeLay's excesses caused her to reconsider, Boxer does not seem to be in a retiring mood.

Rather, the Boxer rebellion of 2005 appears to have less to do with the Senator's own career than with her sense that Congressional Democrats need to reflect the grassroots passion she witnessed on the 2004 campaign trail. The woman who attended one of the first showings of Michael Moore's *Fahrenheit 9/11*—she says it made her feel guilty for not objecting to the certification of the contested results from Florida's 2000 presidential vote—and

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who posts thank-you notes to Internet blogs that have cheered on her recent dissents has been feeling more and more in tune with her party's rabble-rousing base. "Look, I started out as an activist," says Boxer. "And I came away from that knowing that activism is essential to any kind of change." If people get disengaged because they don't believe their representatives in Washington are listening, she says, "then bad things happen. And bad things are happening, to be honest. So we have to all wake up here."

Whether Boxer can actually wake her party up remains to be seen. But as her profile rises, she is finding that at least some players in the party establishment recognize—as Republican leaders did long ago—that fighting the fights "the base" values can be politically smart. During the Rice nomination debate, the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee dispatched an e-mail appeal for contributions featuring a picture of Boxer and a letter from her that began, "The Republicans were expecting the Senate to confirm Dr. Rice with little debate and questioning from the Foreign Relations Committee. They didn't count on me to ask the tough questions."

Just as Republicans respond to the religious right, Boxer believes Democrats must pay attention to the legitimate fears and passions of those in the labor, environmental, civil rights and antiwar movements—even when this puts them outside the cozy relationships of official Washington, draws the fire of the White House and its amen corner in the media, and scares Democratic insiders, who often appear more afraid of their own party's energized base than of empowered Republicans.

"I've won a lot of elections. And just about every time, the pundits said: 'Barbara Boxer, she's more liberal than her constituents. She's never going to make it.'" Boxer says. "But I got elected. And this last time I got elected by a wide margin. So I think there is a message here—that people, even if they don't agree with every single thing that you say or do, they do appreciate candor. They do appreciate someone who is going to say really what they think and not filter it through to the point where it's mush."

Barbara Boxer has taken the filter—and the gloves—off. Now, the question is whether she can get the Democratic Party to do the same. ■

LETTERS
CONTINUED

(Continued From Page 2)

FEATHERSTONE REPLIES

New York City

■ It is possible to serve poor people and screw them at the same time: Wal-Mart lowers wages and living standards even as it brings convenience and bargains to a community. My emphasis on Wal-Mart's appeal to the working poor was to point out the political complexities Wal-Mart's critics face, the lack of market power held by the company's consumers, and the need to take action beyond the cash register.

Sarah Clark refutes an assertion I never made—that Wal-Mart sets up stores "only" in low-income areas—leaving unchallenged my actual point, that the company operates "primarily" in poor areas. Her mention of four Wal-Marts in wealthy towns—out of its more than 3,000 US stores—hardly advances a conversation about the company's general tendencies.

Wal-Mart has many money-saving strategies—another that Clark neglected to mention is forcing manufacturers to sell at such low prices that they have to move operations to Chinese sweatshops. But exploitation of its US workers is one of the ways prices are kept low, as Clark essentially admits by using the wiggle-word "most." I wrote correctly that the average wage at Wal-Mart is just over $8 an hour; Clark's figure includes only full-time workers, ignoring the company's part-timers, who make up one-third of its workforce and are often kept deliberately underemployed to save Wal-Mart from paying for benefits. Wal-Mart's wages are well below the average retail wage, which is $12.17.

Clark also deftly notes that Wal-Mart employees have "health insurance" without mentioning that employees pay more than 40 percent of the premium. (Anthony Wright's letter more accurately illustrates Wal-Mart's attitude toward healthcare for employees.)

Most employment class-action suits against large companies focus on a particular region, store or division, not the entire company. Wal-Mart is the defendant in the largest civil-rights class action in history not simply because it is a large company but because the retailer's patterns of promotion have been consistently egregious throughout its operations nationwide. *Dukes v. Wal-Mart* is based on data showing that Wal-Mart lagged far behind its competitors in the promotion of women in nearly every state and paid women less than men in nearly every single position. In 1999 Wal-Mart had the same percentage of female managers that competing retailers had achieved in 1975.

It's endearing that Wal-Mart boasts about its feminist achievements: namely, that some women have been able to advance into positions of power. I hope the company's PR folks remembered to send Betty Dukes a Christmas card this year, with a note of thanks, because many of the cheering developments Clark mentions in her letter—increased numbers of women in management, the promotion of Linda Dillman and Claire Watts—occurred after Dukes's lawsuit was filed, probably as a direct result.

Finally, I'm delighted that Wal-Mart sells my first book, *Students Against Sweatshops*, on its website. (Thanks, Wal-Mart!) But I'm amused that the company would brag about that, thus highlighting the mysterious absence from its inventory of my second book, *Selling Women Short: The Landmark Battle for Workers' Rights at Wal-Mart*, which has in its first three months sold many times more copies than the first title and is far more likely to interest Wal-Mart customers. LIZA FEATHERSTONE

Our assortment of letters castigating Robert Grossman for his January 24 "Babe Lincoln" cartoon and the editors for publishing it ["Letters," Feb. 14] elicited a flurry of mail castigating those letter writers. Below are two.
—The Editors

'THE BABE' IS BACK

Fort Wayne, Ind.

■ I'm certainly not *The Nation*'s biggest defender, but might I suggest that before we gay boys get our pearls in a knot over a transgressive portrayal of President Lincoln in drag, we check our transphobia at the door? Why is it so offensive for a gay man to be portrayed as a drag queen? Isn't this a little akin to a straight person recoiling in horror when someone mistakes him (her) for a queer? I agree that we live in a time of increasingly brutal and repressive policies here and abroad. Doesn't this suggest that we need more transgressive speech and writing, not less? GREG SMITH

Ukiah, Calif.

■ I just wanted to add my two cents on the "Stereotype by Daguerreotype" brouhaha: What is up with progressives in this country? Where is the *sense of humor*? As a black, bisexual, wiccan, radical female feminist, I have every reason to be "sensitive" to the way humans are portrayed in print. However, I refuse to let go of my sense of humor. To my dismay, too many on "our side" want to go through life with the exact grim (and hateful?) mentality that many on "their side" do. *Laughter* is one of the things that make us sane in the midst of all this misery and horror. Shame on all those folks who took offense. Get a bloody sense of humor, people!
BONNIE HARRIS

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COMMENT

(Continued From Page 6)

yond repair, but these revelations certainly point in this direction." For the record, it should be noted that Hyde held that opinion before the Oil for Food program was set up, let alone the inquiry. But what are the Volcker revelations? In fact, any objective reading of the report rebuts the fevered right-wing slanders that triggered the inquiry. After all, this was supposed to be what one typically hyperbolic conservative columnist has called the greatest financial scandal in the history of the universe.

Volcker's report finds that because of political pressure, the UN gave inspection contracts for the Oil for Food program to British and Dutch firms. The Iraqis wanted either a Swiss or a French bank to handle the fund's escrow account, and after Secretary of State Madeleine Albright opposed choosing a Swiss bank, then–Secretary General Boutros Boutros Ghali chose a French one.

More damaging, the report produces a lot of evidence suggesting that Benon Sevan, the head of the Oil for Food fund, used his influence to introduce an oil company to the Iraqis. Sevan denies that and also denies the implication of the report that the company paid him $160,000 over four years in commissions on the sales, which were in themselves perfectly legal. He had recorded these amounts at the time as gifts from his now-dead aunt in Cyprus, and he still maintains that is what they are. However, as the report points out, if these payments were from the oil company, they did indeed represent a serious breach of trust and ethics but are not necessarily illegal—as in fact Volcker himself has said. Annan has suspended Sevan and another official. However, even if proven, $160,000 of alleged corruption is hardly on the scale of the DFI's $8.8 billion, which the Coalition Provisional Authority used as walking-around money during the first year of the occupation.

Other conservative commentators have alleged that the UN was profiting from the suffering of the Iraqi people by taking "commissions" on the oil sales. The report concludes that 2.2 percent of oil revenues the Security Council set aside to cover the costs of the program were indeed used to administer the fund, and that, in fact, "$372 million, or twenty-seven percent of the total oil proceeds... was transferred...to be used directly for the benefit of the Iraqi people." He doesn't mention that the $372 million ended up in the DFI to be mismanaged by the CPA.

The Volcker report reiterates that Saddam Hussein may have skimmed $228 million from the Oil for Food program. But he also raked in more than $13 billion from sales mostly to Turkey and Jordan, which were separate from the program and conducted with the full knowledge and tacit blessing of the Security Council, the State Department and Congress. As Richard Lugar, GOP chair of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, said, council members, including the United States, "must also answer questions as to why they, too, did not pay greater scrutiny to this program."

But of course they won't, and the unequal attention given to the two reports demonstrates why not. Volcker's inquiry will go on, all the way up to Kofi Annan and his son Kojo, and it may possibly detail lots of the inefficiencies in the UN's handling of the funds. But the International Advisory and Monitoring Board, set up by Resolution 1483 to scrutinize the DFI, is unlikely to succeed in its probe, since the Bush Administration's satraps in Baghdad refused to cooperate with it, and they are unlikely to get a look into Paul Bremer's computer, let alone those of Halliburton and the Pentagon. IAN WILLIAMS

Ian Williams is The Nation*'s UN correspondent.*

In Fact . . .

OSSIE DAVIS

■ Politically active actors are not a rarity, but Ossie Davis, who died on February 4, aged 87, towered over most of them. What is truly rare is for art and political conviction to be so powerfully allied in one man. "He made no distinction between his art and his political convictions," said Jewell Handy Gresham, a friend and editor of *The Nation*'s special issue on the black family (July 24, 1989), to which Davis was the sole male contributor. Gresham recalled that Davis's fiercely devoted wife and longtime acting partner, Ruby Dee, was opposed to his saliency as the lone male. After the issue was nominated for a National Magazine Award, he felt vindicated. "Jewell," he said, "thanks for helping me show the woman I love we were right." Davis and Dee, who often co-starred on stage, were co-stars in the civil rights movement since the 1940s, and were emcees at the 1963 March on Washington. Ossie Davis never curtailed his fight for equality out of concern for his career. He was a robust orator and versatile writer, author of the hit play *Purlie Victorious*, which satirized racial stereotypes. For a 2000 Nation Institute banquet, he wrote, "America is still the Great Unfinished Land, needing more from its lovers than just our death and taxes...." His eloquence won him the assignment of delivering eulogies at many funerals, most famously Malcolm X's, of whom he said, "He...was our shining black prince" and "in honoring him we honor the best in ourselves." That could be Davis's epitaph, says Gresham.

MINORITY/MAJORITY

■ *Barbara Boxer, profiled on page 18, knows what's needed for Democrats to become the majority party again. Unfortunately, many in the party don't. Beginning with this issue, every other week David Sirota of the Center for American Progress will single out Democrats whose actions help, and hurt, the cause.*

Permanent Minority: Representative Allen Boyd has the dubious distinction of being the first Democrat to endorse privatizing Social Security. Newly elected Colorado Senator Ken Salazar defended Attorney General Alberto Gonzales's nomination, despite his involvement in the Iraq torture scandals.

Toward the Majority: Montana Senator Max Baucus, who helped the White House pass its 2001 tax cuts for the rich and its Medicare bill, came out against Social Security privatization, signaling other red-state Democrats to strongly oppose the President's plan. Most Senate Democrats voted against Gonzales.

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Letter From Ground Zero

(Continued From Page 8)

bloodied Sadr's forces in several weeks of fighting in the holy Shiite city of Najaf, and then he successfully summoned both sides to join in a truce in which the forces of both were withdrawn from the city. He granted a meeting to Sadr, who offered a guarded fealty. At the same time, Sistani expressed a sort of vague acceptance of Sadr's enemy, the US- and UN-appointed interim government.

Still another potential challenge to Sistani's plan was the largely Sunni insurgency, heavily concentrated in the city of Falluja. When, after a long delay, American forces attacked Falluja, Sistani again stood aside; but this time, he made no offer to broker a truce or mutual troop withdrawals. Falluja was bombed, emptied of most of its people, invaded and occupied.

Sistani's stance toward the occupation had now become at least implicitly equivocal. Having defied the United States in the matter of the election, he had twice stood by while American forces battered internal enemies—first Sadr, then the Sunni Fallujan rebels. Even as he was offering the elections as a means of ending the occupation, he was relying on the occupation to make the elections happen.

Then yet another danger to the election took shape, this time in the form of bloody attacks largely by Sunni insurgents upon Shiites specifically, including one of Sistani's aides. Sistani acted once again to defend his plan—this time imposing a remarkable and impressive restraint on his followers, who did not retaliate. Had they done so, he certainly knew, the country might have descended into civil war, and the elections would have been ruined. The Sunnis could still boycott the voting, and the great majority of them reportedly did, but they failed to stop it entirely.

In sum, the election on January 30—conceived by Sistani, forced upon a reluctant Bush Administration by Sistani, and defended by Sistani (in concert with American forces) against both Shiite and Sunni insurrections—was first and foremost a kind of Shiite uprising. It was an astonishingly successful revolt against subjugation and repression that Shiites have suffered in Iraq at the hands of foreigners and domestic minorities alike. That this uprising took the form of a peaceful election rather than a bloody rebellion is owing to the shrewdness, and possibly the wisdom, of Sistani.

The results of the election, though incomplete at this writing, confirm that it was above all a Shiite event. As expected, Shiite and Kurdish turnout was reportedly high, Sunni turnout low. The joy the world witnessed at the polling places was mostly Shiite joy. (If Kurds were less effusive, it was because they had long been the de facto masters of their territory.)

What the election was not was a decision by "the Iraqi people." It's not even clear that at this moment there is such a thing as the Iraqi people. Opinion among scholars and others is divided on the point. Iraq is a nation without a constitution (it is governed by a Transitional Administrative Law) and without a state. If some observers are correct, it is also a nation without a nation. Its three major groups—the Shiites, Sunnis and Kurds—lack the common ties, these scholars say, required for nationhood and have merely been forced to live in a single polity, first by the British and then by Saddam. (It's notable that Massoud Barzani, the president of the Kurdistan Democratic Party, took the occasion of the election to comment that he hopes to see an independent Kurdistan in his lifetime.) Other observers argue that genuine national feeling still can unite the groups.

It's significant—and discouraging—that Sistani's first act after the election was to signal through aides that all Iraqi law should be founded in Islamic law. For all his tactical sagacity, he may turn out to belong to the long list of leaders able to win power but unable to found a just new order. All the parties express a desire to avoid civil war, but there is a distinct possibility that what the vote strengthened was not "the Iraqi people" but each of the subgroups. The high vote of the Shiites and the low vote of the Sunnis may have carried the same message: When all is said and done, we are more faithful to the interest of our own group than to a unified Iraq. The very steps Sistani took to achieve the Shiite electoral triumph may turn out to have fatally undermined any future government. When he acquiesced in the smashing of Falluja, he passed up an opportunity for national solidarity that may not come soon again. The danger for the Shiite leadership is that by associating themselves with an occupying power, they will—even among many Shiites—throw away the legitimacy that the election has just given them. Then all hopes, including those so movingly expressed on January 30, will have been betrayed.

It's in this radically unpredictable and rapidly developing context that the question of the future of the American occupation must be considered. There can be no doubt that the election was a rebellion by the Shiites against their traditional oppressors in Iraq. Was it also a rebellion against the occupation? For all the eloquence of the voters at the polls, they gave little clue on this point. In the coverage I saw, there was much gratitude for voting but little or no love for Americans. The scene of the Iraqi woman kissing the mother of the slain American soldier occurred in Washington at the State of the Union address, not in Iraq. Some voters said that their vote had been against the occupation as well as past tyranny, but they also were few.

Since the invasion, Americans have been absorbed in the debate over whether US troops should remain in Iraq ("stay the course") or leave. The issue of the moment is whether the commitment should be open-ended or, as I believe, limited by a deadline for withdrawal. The danger for the United States in staying is that it will wind up on one side of a civil war that its presence will continually exacerbate but be unable to quell. This American debate is crucial, but now a prior question pushes to the fore. Will the new leadership of Iraq invite American troops to stay or ask them to leave?

The rudiments of a new governing authority in Iraq have appeared for the first time since the war that felled Saddam. It's unknowable whether such an authority can surmount the sectarian divisions it faces—in effect, creating an Iraqi nation—or, if it does succeed, whether it will invite American forces to remain. What we can know is that from now on it is Iraqis, not Americans, who will be making the most fundamental decisions in their country.

Jonathan Schell is the Nation Institute's Harold Willens Peace Fellow. The Jonathan Schell Reader *was recently published by Nation Books.*

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BOOKS & THE ARTS

Grand Illusion

STEFAN COLLINI

MALRAUX: A Life.
By Olivier Todd.
Translated by Joseph West.
Knopf. 541 pp. $35.

André Malraux incarnated a certain ideal of "the French intellectual." A writer of international renown, he distinguished himself as a man of action before going on to become an eye-catching politician. But above all, Malraux was a world-class fantasist. Having invented himself, he then constantly reinvented a past commensurate with the stature he imagined himself to have attained. General de Gaulle said that by having Malraux at his right hand he was "shielded from the commonplace." That was indeed Malraux's specialty. What he represented—politically, artistically, humanly—was transcendence of the mundane. He regarded his first duty to himself to be that of escaping from the petty. The nouns in his life all had to have capital letters. The great novel or epic that his career always strove to become needed to be freed from the entangling minutiae of history so that he could take his place in History. Malraux was on intimate terms with Mankind; his diary was filled with dates with Posterity. The day-to-day was tiresome, the Eternal exhilarating. One did not belong among pygmies.

Malraux gave himself airs so that others could more easily recognize his greatness. He never answered the telephone, even at home; it was not consistent with his dignity. "Nobody disturbs General de Gaulle on the telephone," he commented, justifying his affectation by placing himself in the only company he thought appropriate. His relationship with de Gaulle is the key to the second half of Malraux's life. After the liberation of France in 1944, Malraux supported de Gaulle against the Communists in the struggle to become the legitimate representatives of post-Vichy France. Thereafter, it suited de Gaulle to have the unconditional allegiance of a leading writer and intellectual who was also an accredited hero. Malraux gave de Gaulle a certain cultural legitimacy, just as de Gaulle gave Malraux a certain political protection.

In turn, Malraux provides a clue to understanding what outsiders often find so baffling about the behavior of the French state. Occupying lead roles in the theater of appearances, both de Gaulle and Malraux were more exercised by the need to cut a fine, and wholly French, figure than by the obligation to pursue the least bad course of action. The ambition was partly individual, but it was also historical and collective, a tradition of conceiving politics more in terms of *la gloire* than of GNP. Moreover, it is a recurring vanity in French leaders to want to be thought of as writers as well as statesmen: One aims to shape History but also to shape the history books. Malraux encouraged de Gaulle to think that he was penning the national epic; de Gaulle encouraged Malraux to believe that he was an actor on the world stage. In either case, one does not fulfill one's tryst with destiny by scrabbling about among the footnotes. One embodies one's Country, one expresses one's Country, one illumines the Human Condition. De Gaulle and Malraux recognized the grandeur of France in each other.

For Malraux, de Gaulle's right-hand man, the day-to-day was tiresome, the Eternal exhilarating. One did not belong among pygmies.

A life passed in this elevated register is not likely to emerge unscathed from that most mundane and unforgiving of forms, the carefully researched, coolly appraising biography. Olivier Todd's lively account is not primarily distinguished by its coolness, but his research in the biographical sources and his knowledge of the period are more than enough to show up the fabrications out of which the myth of Malraux was woven. Yet even the unvarnished facts read like an

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amalgam of famous fictional characters—out of Victor Hugo by Ernest Hemingway, with a dash of Graham Greene (for several years Malraux was a whisky minister to match Greene's whisky priest).

Born in 1901 into a struggling middle-class family, Malraux did not follow the *cursus* of the classic French intellectual. He did not even finish his secondary schooling, let alone receive any higher education (though later in life he mostly got away with the claim that he had taken a degree from the École des langues orientales in Paris). Having dabbled in the second-hand book trade and become a minor reviewer, he was still in his early 20s when he was arrested for looting temples in Cambodia; suitably buffed up, this episode became the foundation for his later reputation as an expert on Eastern art. He briefly edited an anti-colonial newspaper in French Indochina before returning to make a literary career in Paris, a strategy that paid off handsomely when he won the Prix Goncourt in 1933 for his third novel, *La Condition Humaine*, a panoramic account of the struggle for human dignity and solidarity set in Shanghai during the conflict between the Communists and Chiang Kai-shek's nationalists. One of the things that most strikes the non-French reader of this biography is the extraordinary prestige accorded to writers in France during this period: Their utterances, however vacuous or pernicious, were guaranteed respectful attention. Winning the Goncourt at the age of 32 was a success from which Malraux's career never recovered.

From the Cambodian escapade onward, the heart of the Malraux myth lay in the ideal of the Writer as Man of Action. The Spanish Civil War provided the perfect stage. Without ever joining the Communist Party, Malraux was committed to the anti-Fascist cause, and he gave practical expression to this allegiance by "commanding" a volunteer air squadron on the Republican side. (It's true that he did largely procure and organize the aircraft, but in fact he never flew them himself.) In reality, the terrain of his greatest triumphs was that of publicity. He insured good press coverage of "the Malraux squadron"; rumor had it that his fetching uniform was specially made by Lanvin. At the same time, the Spanish experience fed his imagination, providing the setting both for the celebration of Republican fraternity in his novel *L'Espoir*, published in 1937, and for a film he made in 1938, *Sierra de Teruel*. Malraux was becoming a twentieth-century Renaissance man; it seemed there was nothing he could not do—or at least nothing he could not get away with.

Even in a life largely made up of murky episodes, Malraux's role in the Second World War is where the relations between myth and reality are at their murkiest. In the years just after the war, Malraux made much of how he had been in the Resistance from an early date, acting as "regional commander" in southwest France, arrested by the Germans and wounded while making a brave escape. For these exploits, he was decorated by both the French and British governments. In fact, these claims were nearly all untrue. After the French defeat in 1940 Malraux lived peacefully in southern France, refusing to join the Resistance right up until March 1944, only a few months before the Allied landing in Normandy. He then characteristically set himself up as an "area coordinator," though no Resistance forces corresponded to the units he claimed to be "coordinating." On the strength of his invented standing, and an ability to cut a fine figure in beret and fatigues, he assumed command of a Free French brigade that fought the Germans in eastern France in late 1944. "Colonel Malraux" had never been commissioned and had never received more than basic training, but he proved himself a brave and inspiring leader of the raggle-taggle soldiers, albeit relying on subordinates to look after the nuts and bolts of the operation.

The heart of the Malraux myth lay in the ideal of the Man of Action, but the terrain of his greatest triumphs was that of publicity.

By the end of the war, Malraux had made the personal and political choice that was largely to determine the rest of his life. He became de Gaulle's indispensable man. He was rewarded with a post in the general's first postwar government; only now can one really appreciate the irony that this incorrigible fantasist was put in charge of "information." Meanwhile, his literary standing continued to grow. In 1947 he was only the second living author (Gide had been the first) to be honored with a Pléiade edition of his works; for the next couple of decades there was a constant rumor that he was about to be awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature (on several occasions he turned down election to the Académie Française, believing he should save himself for the higher, more fitting honor).

When in 1958 de Gaulle founded the Fifth Republic and became its first president, he created a new Ministry of Culture; this provided Malraux with the ideal stage for his theatrical talents (though he had characteristically hoped for something grander still). He stayed in office until de Gaulle's final resignation eleven years later, an extraordinary length of time for a minister in the unstable world of postwar French politics. Malraux was de Gaulle's cultural *force de frappe*: His mere presence helped the French government to face down potentially damaging critics. Malraux, needless to say, still yearned for the glamour of frontline action. When in 1961 right-wing generals briefly threatened an uprising against de Gaulle, who appeared to be moving toward granting independence to Algeria, the 60-year-old Minister of Culture declared himself ready to command a tank unit against them; his officials had to look away. For a period in the mid-1960s, Malraux was sometimes too drunk to conduct the daily business of his ministry—but then the daily *anything* was never his forte.

His strength as a politician lay in making the large public gesture. He gloried in being the man who "took the Mona Lisa to Washington" (against the unanimous advice of the Louvre's curators). He committed substantial sums of public money to the cleaning and restoration of Paris's monuments and facades (though it had been begun by others before him). He established Maisons de la Culture in French provincial towns. But as any B-list celebrity instinctively knows, what really counts is whom you are photographed with. Just as Malraux had met with Trotsky before the war, now he met with Mao (a much mythologized and embroidered event) and with Nehru, JFK and Nixon. Nor did he neglect his literary reputation. When his hard-to-classify *Antimémoires* came out in 1967, its success (it would sell 200,000 copies in three weeks) surprised everyone except the author. As he informed his daughter at the time, "I am the only writer who counts." A sign of another kind of standing was the fact that he had a dish named after him at his favorite Parisian restaurant, the very expensive Lasserre (Pigeon André Malraux; Todd includes the recipe), thereby achieving at least one kind of immortality to match Chateaubriand's. For some years before his death in 1976 he was, as Todd nicely puts it, "drugged with honor and respect." He had long been intoxicated with a sense of his own importance; his remarkable achievement was to persuade so many others to share that sense.

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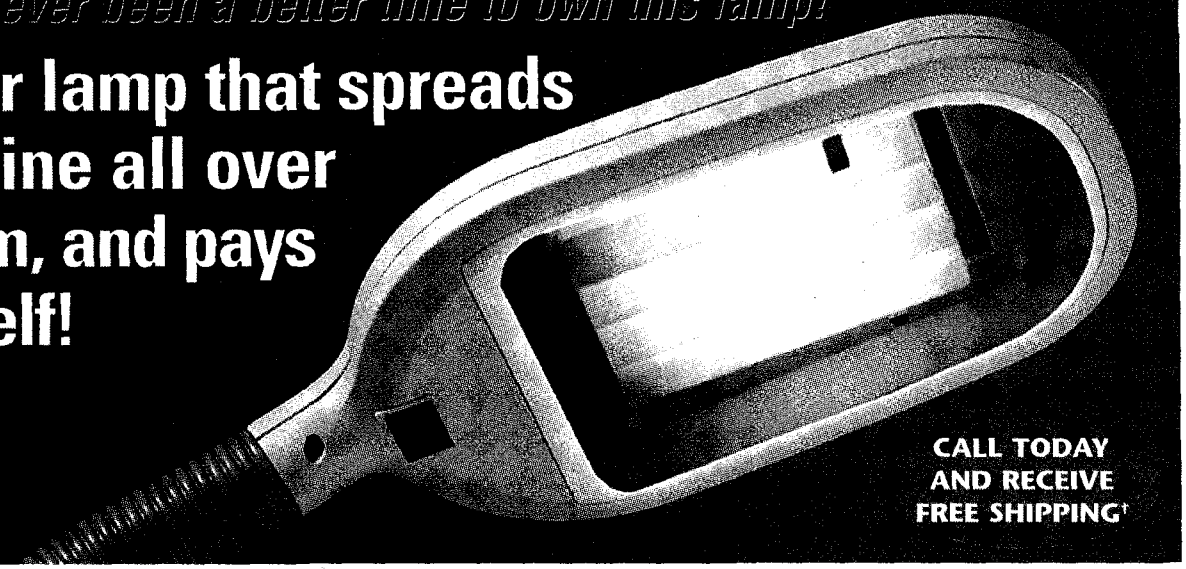

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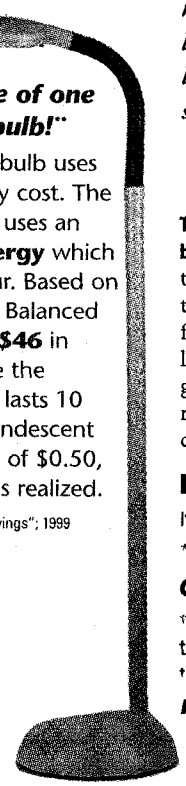

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"Lie" is a rough word. Todd has occasion to use it more than once of Malraux, and with reason, but there is a sense in which it reduces him unduly. To term Malraux's high-handed doctorings of the historical record "lies" is to domesticate them, to reinsert them into the fabric of the everyday. To Malraux, they were expressions of an essential, supra-mundane truth. As with certain religious thinkers, his mind roved beyond the borders of the knowable with easy majesty. Unclarities and inconsistencies only showed that one was a true explorer of the universe of the imagination; tidying up the loose ends would at least provide some enjoyment for the pygmies.

One risk of living one's life entirely in the major key is that bathos and humiliation can never be far away. But in Malraux's case it also meant that he could rise to the state occasions of human experience more readily than any of the earthbound plodders, and there are times when only the elevated will do. He had, it must be said, a marvelous capacity to inspire, whether addressing troops facing a high risk of death or recalling the claims on the living of some moral giant now dead. In 1964 Malraux delivered a eulogy for Jean Moulin, the Resistance leader executed by the Germans, on the occasion of the transfer of Moulin's ashes to the Panthéon. Wrapped against the cold, his voice cracking and echoing in the badly connected microphones, Malraux's tribute remains a haunting performance. The oratory is more than dated; it has a Racinian, even Roman, cadence to it. It is excessive, and thus right for an occasion when mere accuracy of fact and characterization would have been thinly inadequate.

Todd's biography has a certain racy charm, but the reader should be warned that it is written in the present tense throughout; in English, this comes across as a striving for dramatic immediacy, something that, across several hundred pages, is bound to grate. There is also a good deal of reconstructed dialogue, quite a few asides to the reader and some maddening descents into the style of tabloid journalism. This, for example, is how Todd narrates the moment when Malraux learns that his lover Louise de Vilmorin is simultaneously having an affair with another man. "Why should Malraux have it all? Some kind soul tells him about the Vilmorin-Sieburg affair. Free love? No thanks, and not with me: Malraux breaks it off. Three women to run away from.... Travel is a cure for women. Sometimes." Malraux's own prose could be oracular, gnomic and mannered, but it never, ever, sounded like a series of captions to a photo spread in *Paris Match*.

The final tragedy of the life of this compelling, extravagant, flawed man—a tragedy he would have felt more keenly than almost anyone with whom he shared "his" century—was that there was no André Malraux on hand to pronounce the *éloge* when, in 1996, twenty years after his death, he was accorded the ultimate accolade of having *his* ashes transferred to the Panthéon. He was installed in the temple of France's *grands hommes*, among those few peers whose company he had long craved, to the accompaniment of tired clichés spoken by that most banal of Gaullist machine politicians, Jacques Chirac. At the last, Malraux had fallen among mere mortals, a giant carried on the shoulders of pygmies. Sometimes, history can be the cruelest mistress of all. ■

Misunderstanding Iran

REZA ASLAN

THE PERSIAN PUZZLE: The Conflict Between Iran and America. By Kenneth M. Pollack. Random House. 539 pp. $26.95.

A threatening storm gathers in the Middle East. A rogue nation in the hands of a tyrannical regime with possible ties to Al Qaeda and a history of supporting global terrorism is secretly developing weapons of mass destruction, which pose an imminent risk to the security of the United States and its allies in the region. Sound familiar?

It is becoming increasingly clear that the rhetoric the Bush Administration employed to justify its pre-emptive invasion of Iraq may have been better suited to Iraq's neighbor Iran. Now, as Iraq tumbles toward autonomy, the Bush Administration is frantically shifting its attention to the seemingly graver threat posed by Iran. According to some estimates, Iran is three to five years from developing the capability to produce nuclear weapons. And while most analysts agree that Iran's nuclear ambition is as much a response to regional instability and the nuclear threat posed by Israel as it is a reaction to the aftermath of September 11 and the invasion of Iraq, there is no consensus on what to do about it.

On the one hand, a war against Iran seems highly unlikely, with 150,000 American soldiers fighting an insurgency in neighboring Iraq. On the other hand, as Seymour Hersh recently reported in *The New Yorker*, influential figures in the Pentagon are said to favor the military option, and the Bush Administration has been noticeably cool toward the efforts by Britain, France and Germany to coax Iran out of its nuclear program, efforts that cannot succeed without American support. Meanwhile, as the world squabbles over whether to wield the carrot or the stick with Tehran, Iran's nuclear clock continues to tick, creating what Kenneth Pollack calls "a problem from Hell" in his new book, *The Persian Puzzle*, an ambitious analysis of the past, present and future of US-Iran relations.

Pollack, a former CIA analyst now at the Brookings Institution, rose to prominence in 2002 for his acclaimed book *The Threatening Storm: The Case for Invading Iraq*. The book was widely hailed as a balanced, reasoned and well-documented polemic against allowing a nuclear-armed Saddam Hussein to remain in power in Iraq. It was also catastrophically wrong.

As everyone now knows, Saddam possessed no weapons of mass destruction, and certainly not the nuclear capabilities that would have warranted a pre-emptive invasion. Pollack has spent most of the past year apologizing for his part in this colossal miscalculation. "I made a mistake based on faulty intelligence," he recently confessed to *The New York Times Magazine*. "Of course, I feel guilty about it. I feel awful...I'm sorry; I'm sorry!" Pollack now admits that prewar intelligence was severely hampered by a lack of physical access to and direct knowledge of Iraq on the part of military analysts like himself. All the more dismaying, then, to find the same fatuous intelligence that made Iraq such a mess underlying his analysis of Iran.

Despite never having been to Iran, never reading the Iranian press, never consulting with any Iranian government officials or policy-makers, knowing no Persian and

Reza Aslan's first book, No god but God: The Origins, Evolution, and Future of Islam, *will be published by Random House in March.*

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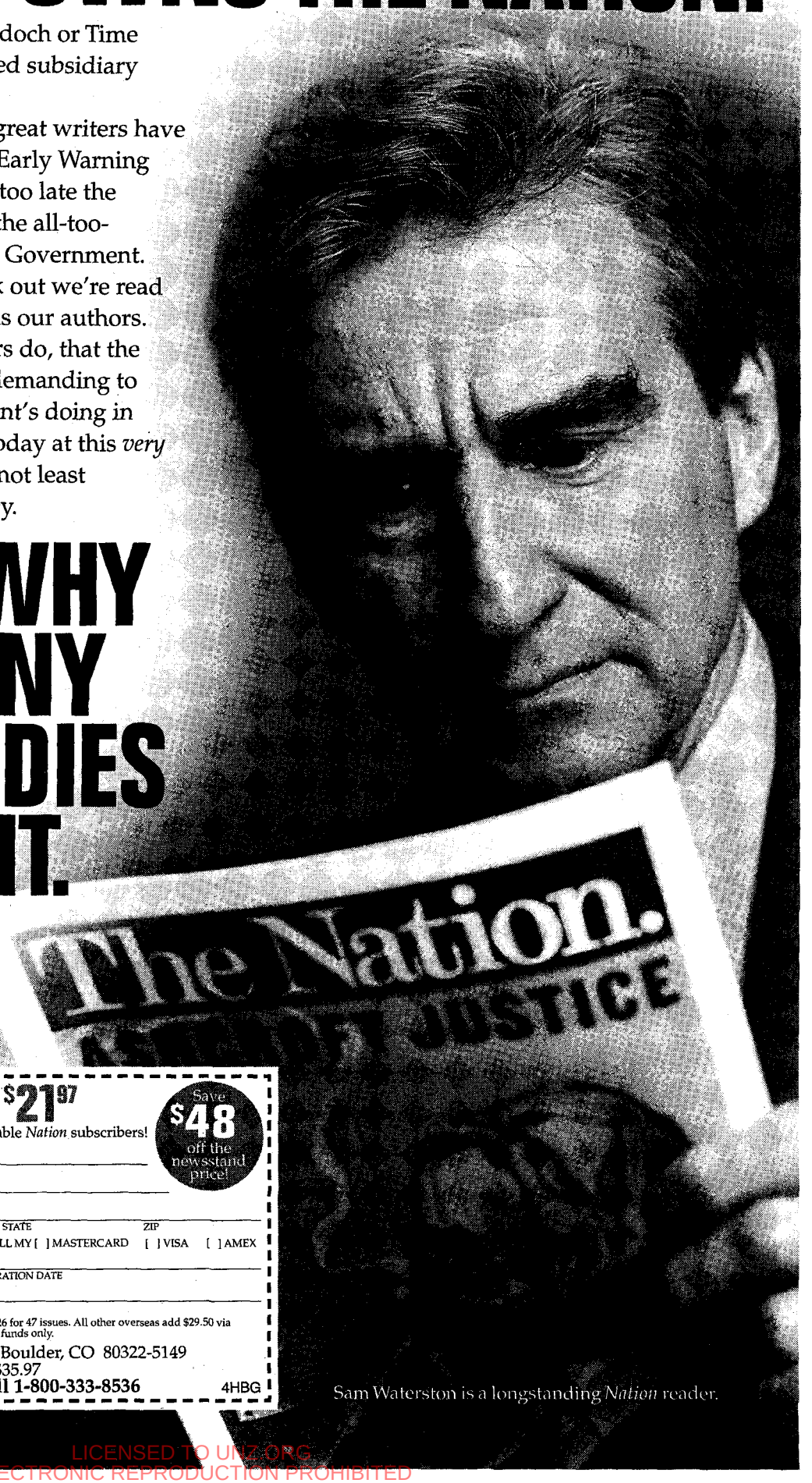

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only "dribs and drabs" of Arabic, and viewing Iranian policy solely "through the eyes of America's intelligence and defense communities," Pollack has devised what he believes should be the blueprint for US-Iran relations. Of course, such limitations do not necessarily preclude an intelligent and capable analyst like Pollack from making certain astute observations about Iran. But, by his own admission, any viable analysis of Iran requires both a mastery of Iranian history and an intimate awareness of Iranian culture, neither of which is evinced by *The Persian Puzzle*.

In truth, Pollack's book is less analysis than psychoanalysis. He begins it by casting the United States and Iran as "former lovers who went through a messy divorce" and concludes with the assertion that until Iran comes to grips with its "emotional baggage" and its "unresolved pathologies," it is simply not "psychologically ready" to have a "meaningful relationship with the United States."

Less analysis than psychoanalysis, Pollack's book portrays America and Iran as 'former lovers who went through a messy divorce.'

In Pollack's narrative, the two countries first met in the dark and heady days at the end of World War II. At the time, Iran was a wracked and weary nation reeling from a colonial *ménage à trois* it had stumbled into with the British and Russians, while the United States—rugged, buoyant and flushed with victory—was only just beginning to sow its oats as a virile superpower. Aghast at the "imperial ambitions" of its wartime allies and supposedly motivated solely by its desire to see an "independent, stable, and prosperous Iran," the United States grudgingly asserted itself in Iranian affairs to free the country from the iron grip of Stalinism and to temper the rapacious greed of the British Anglo-Iranian Oil Company. Yet, having come to Iran's rescue, the United States suddenly found itself shackled with a frail and emotionally needy country that viewed itself as "the center of the universe" and cleaved to its new benefactor as though America were a savior with the ability to control its destiny.

At first, the United States tried to live up to the responsibilities of its new *affaire de guerre* by funneling money and resources into Iran. But this only "whetted Iranian appetites for more, and when it was not forthcoming they felt betrayed." Unhinged at the thought of sharing America's attention with the younger, budding nations of Europe and East Asia, Iran grew enraged and, like a jilted lover, lashed out at the United States for failing to live up to Iran's unreasonable expectations.

This, then, is what Pollack believes is the recurrent theme that runs through the history of US-Iran relations. Time after time, the United States has sought to push "political, economic, and social reform" by interfering in Iranian affairs. And yet, despite "America's good intentions," it has received "little credit from the Iranian people" for its efforts, only anger and blame. Perhaps there were times when American interference was carried out "in very unpopular ways," but in Pollack's view the extent of that interference has been "wildly exaggerated by Iranians."

Take, for example, the 1953 CIA-engineered coup that reinstalled Muhammad Reza Shah after he had been ousted in a popular revolution led by the nationalist forces of Muhammad Mossadegh. In Pollack's version of events, the CIA did not so much orchestrate the putsch as intensify "trends already under way." Pollack argues that Mossadegh's "undemocratic actions" had "effectively made [him] dictator of Iran" (an appellation he never applies to the Shah, the actual dictator of Iran), thereby eroding his support among the masses and making his political demise inevitable.

That there were deeply divisive factions vying for power in the chaotic aftermath of the nationalist revolution is hard to deny. But it is another thing to suggest that, had the United States not engineered the coup, the "Iranians would have done it themselves." Despite the fact that the overthrow of Mossadegh was given the highest priority by both Eisenhower and Churchill; that it was endorsed by Secretary of Defense Charles Wilson and Secretary of State John Foster Dulles; that it was personally managed by CIA chief Allen Dulles, who sent $1 million to Iran to be used "in any way that would bring about [Mossadegh's] fall"; that four-fifths of the newspapers in Tehran were at the time run by the CIA; and that the so-called popular demonstration of clerics, peasants, soldiers, criminals and street thugs that ultimately brought Mossadegh down was rounded up, instructed and bribed by CIA agent Kermit Roosevelt—despite the overwhelming evidence of America's hand in destabilizing Iran, Pollack somehow cannot accept that Mossadegh's political and religious opponents were acting "in response to Western overtures." Pollack attributes this view to the "tragic-mythic version" of events fabricated by an Iranian imagination prone to blame "everything but the weather on foreign subversion." And yet, after all his apologetics and revisionism, Pollack admits that "there is a kernel of truth" in the Iranian version: namely, that "the United States *did* help to overthrow Mosaddeq, and it *was* culpable in the establishment of the despotism" that followed.

Therein lies the principal failing of *The Persian Puzzle*. Pollack's thesis is that "the only way to understand the twenty-five-year confrontation between Iran and the United States is to know the history of the relationship." This is no doubt true. But Pollack's grasp of that history is too often myopic and sometimes startlingly jingoistic. In fact, his chief purpose in recapping the history of US-Iran relations seems to be to argue that while many of our problems are "a product of American mistakes made twenty-five or fifty years ago," those mistakes have been so "embellished and exaggerated to grandiose proportions by the Iranian imagination" as to make rapprochement all but impossible.

Pollack is not even sure what the use of rapprochement with Iran would be. Casting aside Iran's strategic and geographical importance in an increasingly unstable region, Pollack writes, "I don't think the United States 'needs' Iran; we have been isolated from Iran for twenty-five years and in that time have experienced the most extraordinary economic prosperity in our history.... Clearly, the lack of a warm relationship with Iran has not exactly held us back."

Still, Pollack's fear of a nuclear-armed Iran ultimately leads him to draw upon his blinkered interpretation of Iranian history to devise a new policy for dealing with the Islamic Republic. However, because he disputes the effectiveness of either unilateral concessions that would incrementally remove economic sanctions or a comprehensive settlement of Iran's "silly grievances," he ends up with a scheme that, stripped of its policy-wonkism, amounts to little more than a perpetuation of the ineffectual containment policy already in place (albeit with the caveat that the United States should continue its "development of anti-ballistic missile defenses," just in case).

But as a recent report by the Council on Foreign Relations declared, two and a half decades of sanctioning, isolating and containing Iran has only strengthened the hand of the country's clerical regime, accelerated its weapons program and made the achievement of a full-fledged democracy

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there a more distant prospect. For this reason, many foreign policy experts, most notably Zbigniew Brzezinski and Richard Haass, have been publicly calling for the Administration to follow Europe's lead and actively pursue negotiations with Iran's clerical regime.

Pollack remains skeptical, pointing to President Clinton's failed attempts to coax Iran into dialogue as proof that negotiations are doomed to failure. But Clinton's efforts came at a time when Iran's conservative and reformist factions were embroiled in a cultural civil war for control of the country. In those years, diplomatic relations with the United States were the proverbial "third rail of politics" that few in Iran were willing to touch.

That is no longer the case. The civil war for Iran's future is over, and for the moment the conservatives have won. Iran's clerical establishment is more deeply entrenched now than it has been in a decade. The country's once-vibrant reform movement is slowly crumbling into irrelevance. Despite the dreams of the Bush Administration, the time for another popular revolution has come and gone. In an utterly collapsed economy, where nearly a fifth of the population (and a third of those under 30) is unemployed, the vast majority of Iranians are far too concerned with eking out a living to consider rising en masse against the clerical establishment, the fantasy of Pentagon neoconservatives.

This is precisely why an increasing number of experts now favor the "China policy" of entering into interdependent trade relations with Iran in the hopes that economic growth will foster democratic change. Again, Pollack disagrees, arguing that the removal of economic obstacles in China has only allowed its leaders to ignore pressure for political change by emphasizing the country's economic development. What Pollack does not recognize is that unlike China, Iran is built upon a representative constitutional framework (albeit one that has been hijacked by the clerical oligarchy) and has in place the democratic institutions that can pave the way for dramatic social and political change. However, these institutions can exert themselves only if Iran is *forced* out of its economic isolation. If recent history has proven anything, it is that some sort of representative government plus some sort of free-market economy usually paves the way for national stability and greater openness.

The fact is, there are only three options with regard to Iran. We can continue our failed policy of isolating and containing the regime and simply learn to "live with a nuclear-armed Iran," as Pollack suggests. We can continue with the Administration's plans, recently revealed by Seymour Hersh, to strike Iranian targets pre-emptively in a vain attempt to incite a popular uprising (or, as Dick Cheney hinted, allow Israel do it for us). Or we can put aside our ideological reservations and aggressively engage the clerical regime in diplomacy and dialogue—the way we did with the Soviet Union, the way we do with China.

There is every reason to believe that the clerical establishment, despite its stale, shrill anti-American rhetoric, would jump at the chance at opening economic ties with the United States. It would be an enormous coup for it to accomplish what Iran's reformists have been trying so hard to do for more than a decade. Already the clerics have co-opted the rhetoric of reform in order to appease the population and thereby cling to power: A new generation of clerics now speaks openly of a steady transition to full democracy. Extremism and militancy in the clerical hierarchy are gradually giving way to moderation and pragmatism, particularly in the economic realm, and Iran's leaders have reportedly discouraged their Shiite allies in Iraq from seeking to impose an Islamic theocracy along Iranian lines.

President Bush has launched his second term on a rhetorically bold initiative of spreading freedom and liberty to the world, but he must recognize that there is more than one way to accomplish this task. Indeed, in Iran there is but one way to do so, and that is by stimulating Iran's economy and persuading its leadership to open the country to the rest of the world. This is far from the "siren song" that Pollack suggests it is. It is conceivable that this President, with his impeccably hawkish credentials, is in a position to bring it about. After all, if only Nixon could have gone to China, then perhaps only Bush can call Tehran. ■

Show Me the Money!

GENE SEYMOUR

AMERICA'S GAME: The Epic Story of How Pro Football Captured a Nation. By Michael MacCambridge. Random House. 552 pp. $27.95.

NAMATH: A Biography. By Mark Kriegel. Viking. $27.95.

BIG PLAY: Barra on Football. By Allen Barra. Brassey's. $26.95.

Toward the end of the undervalued 1979 movie adaptation of former pro football receiver Peter Gent's undervalued 1973 novel, *North Dallas Forty*, a beat, bent lineman, played by the late John Matuszak, takes out his postgame frustration on a petty-minded coaching assistant, piercing the latter's abusive cloud of hot wind with this telling grievance: "Every time I call it a game, you call it a business. Every time I call it a business, you call it a game!"

With modest adjustments, this *cri de coeur* could be plaintively submitted by any corporate drone who's ever dreamed outside his or her little gray box. But it's also possible to apply "Tooz's" trenchant line to the problem of writing about professional football as it is played in these United States. You try to bring romance, poetry, even drama to the table and, sooner or later, it's overpowered by the sheer tonnage of dollars and cents involved in making the National Football League the media leviathan it has become. Every time several million dollars changes hands in buying a franchise or securing a TV network contract, the media's eyes get big and round. As with everything else in the pop entertainment firmament, pro football's arcane pleasures can't be taken seriously by solemn minds except in the context of the game's economic reach—and maybe its cultural significance, as when, say, pop singer Janet Jackson had a breast-baring "wardrobe malfunction" during last year's Super Bowl halftime. But even that stuff somehow comes tethered to big bucks. Romance and finance are, to certain sensibilities gazing upon the NFL, one and the same.

There are so many suits and suites in *America's Game*, Michael MacCambridge's chronicle of pro football's mid-twentieth-century ascension to 800-pound orangutan among US sports, that the reader can be forgiven for wondering just what game the book's title refers to. Granted, there are plenty of scores and highlights

Gene Seymour is the film critic for Newsday.

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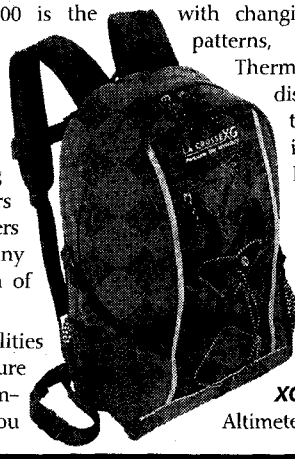

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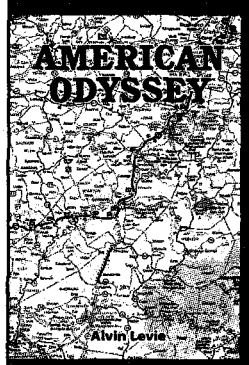
***AMERICAN ODYSSEY*, by Alvin Levie,**



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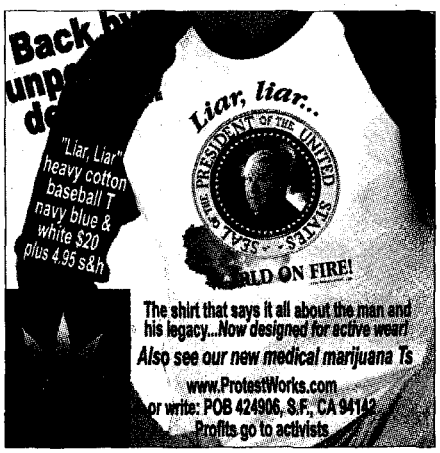
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woven throughout the book. (One expects nothing less from the author who edited a companion volume to ESPN's millennium-capping *SportsCentury* series.) And it would be a foolish historian who fails to make clear, as MacCambridge does, that everything the NFL is today grew out of the 1958 NFL championship game between the New York Giants and the Baltimore Colts. That game made Colts quarterback Johnny Unitas one of the era's exemplars of cool for leading his team to an overtime win and marked pro football's arrival, in MacCambridge's words, "as a viable alternative to baseball, not merely as the most popular sport, but the one that best defined America." Somehow one doesn't remember all of it happening with the immediacy that passage implies. But that "sudden death" game did galvanize many people within reach of a television set—including rich suits like Lamar Hunt, circumspect son of a reactionary Texas oilman, who was inspired by the 1958 game to get himself a pro football team and eventually form the rival American Football League, which would in the end only make the leviathan bigger.

Before Hunt, there were less restrained, more rakish suits setting the table for the bounty to come. Most prominent among these was Bert Bell, the avuncular NFL commissioner who set each season's schedule on his dining room table in Narberth, Pennsylvania, using dominoes and matches; and Dan Reeves, who moved his Rams franchise westward from Cleveland to Los Angeles after World War II and, in so doing, cleared a trail for a modern gold rush for all manner of sports teams. Probably the most important of the suits to emerge before 1958 was Paul Brown, founder and namesake of the Cleveland Browns, who brought streamlined organization, broader racial diversity and tactical ingenuity to the roughhousing pro game.

But of all the starry suits in MacCambridge's constellation, none can match the wattage of Alvin Ray "Pete" Rozelle, Bell's successor as NFL commissioner, a Zen master of public relations who made all the right marketing moves to broaden the game's public profile. Rozelle was also a velvet-fisted negotiator who convinced even the most intractable team owners to share television revenues, which, in keeping less-well-heeled franchises from being poor, made all of them rich. (Some have called this socialism with a corporate face; others have labeled it monopoly at its most insidious. They all have a point, though MacCambridge is content to label the whole thing "equality of opportunity for all.") Rozelle also helped broker the pivotal 1960s merger between the NFL and the AFL. Thus, instead of a bidding war for talent that, some argue, could have capsized both leagues, the suits concocted in its place (cue fireworks!) the Super Bowl, an annual secular holiday during which commercials are treated like competitors at a high-stakes film festival, pop stars jump-start fading personas and—though it's sometimes easy to forget—a football game is played.

Though there's a lot of gee-whiz in MacCambridge's dogged, strenuously thorough account, *America's Game* isn't so awe-struck with its subject that it neglects the bigger smudges: Much (at this late date, maybe too much) is made of Rozelle's decision to let the NFL play its regular games the Sunday after JFK's assassination, while the 1980s are dominated by strikes, players getting into trouble with all kinds of drugs, franchises moving out of their home cities, leaving their longtime fans embittered—at least, that is, until another franchise that abandons its own fan base comes along to replace it. Do I hear witnesses from Baltimore and Cleveland? Amen, brothers and sisters! Say it with me: It's a business. So much so that, judging from the last quadrant of *America's Game*, it becomes harder each year to see past the marketing razzle-dazzle, broad-shouldered deal-making and off-field distractions and find the essence of what attracted so many people to pro-football-as-sport in the first place. To his credit, MacCambridge avoids wading too deep into speculation more cosmic than, say, "Pro football is our biggest civic tent, our last genuinely mass entertainment...the perfect symbol for the country's bustling, modernistic urgency." Somehow, it still comes across like a stockholder's report. *America's Game*? A better title might have been *America's Product*.

Even the league renegades and iconoclasts celebrated in books like *North Dallas Forty* seem slicker and more prefabricated these days. Seen one narcissistic end-zone victory dance by a receiver and you've seen them all. The outrage generated by something as crass as the almost-obscene gesture in January by Minnesota's gifted pass catcher Randy Moss now comes across as part of the show—and very much beside the point of playing the game. With hindsight, the amplification of pro football's showbiz veneer, heralded by the noisy mid-1960s arrival of Joe Namath to the New York Jets, seems less like audacity and more like a product feature awaiting its inevitable standardization.

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And yet, one of the many pleasures offered by Mark Kriegel's biography, *Namath*, is the way it recalls how fresh and exciting it was to suddenly find pro football's rapidly heating core of energy and hype occupied by a prodigious passer with a rock-star's hauteur and a high roller's ring-a-ding swagger. Kriegel's prose, jazzy in the best sense, swaggers along with its subject as it follows the kid who would be "Broadway Joe" out of the steel-mining town of Beaver Falls, Pennsylvania, to the University of Alabama, where he excelled for legendary coach Paul "Bear" Bryant during the flash-point years of the civil rights era—and where he first injured the knee whose subsequent vicissitudes would make Namath supplant Mickey Mantle as the Achilles of New York City's sports wonderland. The roller-coaster ride runs through a series of all-nighters at Manhattan nightclubs, hissy fits with sportswriters, a close brush with the military draft in which, for once, as Kriegel writes, "his bad knee was finally good for something." (If you want to know why so many kids found Namath such an icon in those days, check out what he said after he'd been disqualified for service. "How can I win, man? If I say I'm glad, I'm a traitor and if I say I'm sorry, I'm a fool." Tell me pop king Phil Spector wouldn't have put one of his Brill Building song scribes to work writing music to those words!)

All of which is prelude to Broadway Joe's Achilles moment of apotheosis: the third "World Championship Game" on January 12, 1969, when Namath brashly guaranteed that his underdog Jets, representing the purportedly inferior AFL, would beat the NFL champion Baltimore Colts, who were favored to win the game by 18 to 20 points. Both "the Guarantee" and the Jets' 16–7 upset victory gave Namath a niche in sports history that his professional career, pockmarked with injuries and post-season disappointment, couldn't have justified on its own. Rozelle may have helped create the Super Bowl. Lamar Hunt may have named it. But Namath's cocky candor—viewed now by Kriegel as key to the quarterback's pool hustler's strategy to slither inside his opponents' heads days before kickoff and rattle their nerves by game time—is what gave the Super Bowl its klieg-light unavoidability in the American empire. Putting it in another, less salutary way: No Namath, no "wardrobe malfunction."

The Jets' triumph was viewed immediately and for many years afterward as an epochal triumph of the hip, countercultural AFL over the square, plodding NFL. Yet Allen Barra, in his essay on the game reprinted in his collection *Big Play: Barra on Football*, contends that the following year's Super Bowl, when the AFL's Kansas City Chiefs thrashed the NFL's Minnesota Vikings 23–7, was a far more decisive validation of the merger—and that after the merger took effect in the 1970–71 season, pro football became, if anything, more square and plodding than it had been before the Guarantee.

Barra has made what the film critic Manny Farber once characterized as "termite art" out of puncturing hype balloons and deflating the puffed-up presumptions that pass for conventional wisdom in the sports marketplace. He is among the principal avatars of a brand of sportswriting that bypasses the playing fields and locker rooms to challenge myths reinforced by suits, jocks, coaches, even other sports journalists whose minds have grown flabby with obstinate certainty. If you've ever wondered if it's really true that no pro football team can win without a great running back or questioned the legitimacy of the Heisman Trophy or agonized over whether it's cool to dig the great quarterback Joe Montana even after he crossed the picket line during the 1987 NFL players' strike, Barra is your man. He even has the temerity to claim that Green Bay's Bart Starr was a better quarterback than Johnny Unitas during the 1960s! And he has the added gall to prove it, too.

Barra's work on football constitutes an unruly hypertext to the sometimes intractable narratives America's Product concocts about itself. He frequently and cheekily approaches the game's businesslike patina with his own flow charts and graphs. Yet even with his game face fixed on the "curmudgeon" dial, Barra's enough of a romantic to wax nostalgic about the New York Giants of the early 1960s or gently revive the dormant reputations of underrated (Herschel Walker) or forgotten (Bronko Nagurski) superstars. His go-for-broke contrarianism offers one approach to writing about pro football, while Kriegel's accounts of Namath-led Alabama's glorious defeat in the 1965 Orange Bowl and the spine-tingling 1968 AFL championship battle between Namath's Jets and the Oakland Raiders suggest that it's possible to bring an allusive, hard-boiled stylishness to covering football comparable to the elegiac, plummy tone of baseball prose-poetry. Pro football may never let us forget that its principal business is business. But that doesn't mean we can't get into its head the way Namath did with the Colts thirty-six years ago and play games with its imperial presumptions. ■

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Contexts Magazine Panel

■ Thomas Frank, author of *What's the Matter With Kansas?*, *Nation* columnist Katha Pollitt, University of Pennsylvania sociologist Elijah Anderson and Kimberly DaCosta of Harvard University will be the panelists at *Contexts* magazine's "How Many Americas?" on Thursday, February 24, 6–8 PM at NYU's Kimmel Center, Room 914 (60 Washington Square South at LaGuardia Place). Admission is free.

Nuclear Terrorism: Is America Safer?

■ The World Policy Institute at the New School University will sponsor a presentation and discussion of the new documentary film *Nuclear Terrorism: Is America Safer?* by producer Tom Selinski. Tuesday, March 1, 6–7:30 PM, Wolff Conference Room, 2nd floor, 65 5th Ave. RSVP: The World Policy Institute, New School University, (212) 229-5808.

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TELEVISION

Visible Man

GREG TATE

UNFORGIVABLE BLACKNESS: The Rise and Fall of Jack Johnson

The Jack Johnson story is about many things, but none more emphatically than the meaning of manhood to the Anglo-Saxon imagination at the turn of the century. Or, more pointedly, the degree to which white masculinity had become dependent on the symbolic dominance of colored men. The upheaval that Johnson's boxing successes and success with white women produced in white supremacist minds generated an embarrassment of riches in the leading newspapers of the day. After Johnson became heavyweight champion, the *Los Angeles Times* served up: "A word to the Black Man.... Do not point your nose too high. Do not swell your chest too much. Do not boast too loudly. Do not be puffed up.... You are on no higher plane, deserve no new consideration, and will get none...because your complexion is the same as that of the victor at Reno." What such quotes make evident is that racism isn't just an attitude or an action but a philosophy and that, as with most forms of organized oppression, blame begins at the top.

As James Earl Jones (who played Johnson in the 1968 Broadway and film production *The Great White Hope*) observes in *Unforgivable Blackness: The Rise and Fall of Jack Johnson*, Ken Burns's recently aired four-hour documentary, while race may have framed the story, its real subject is power. The symbolic power of African-Americans' winning big in sports that were once the province of white champions has made Tiger Woods and the Williams sisters not just star athletes but pop stars and corporate endorsement zillionaires. What seems to have changed since Johnson's time is white male acceptance of Black men beating their symbolic ass in sports, and the degree to which "lifestyle" corporations and their Middle American consumers believe anything Black people touch automatically becomes really, really cool.

As the remarkable details of Johnson's anomalous, futuristic life emerge in Burns's film and in the exhaustively detailed book of the same title by Burns's scriptwriter Geoffrey C. Ward, the man comes off more as a contemporary of Muhammad Ali, Miles Davis, Michael Jordan and 50 Cent than as some ancestral Stagolee figure. This is largely because it was not until the 1960s and the rise of Malcolm X, Jimi Hendrix and the Black Panthers that the Anglo-Saxon male had to contend with an onslaught of African-American men as publicly defiant, accomplished and quick-tongued as Johnson.

The book and the film complement each other well—Burns's footage of Johnson in action is astounding, and the commentary from Stanley Crouch, Gerald Early and James Earl Jones provides acerbic, one-two punching Black male insights far more pointed and pithy than anything in Ward's rousing, encyclopedic narrative. Ward's telling, however, won't arouse the ire Burns does among some African-American documentarians and viewers who feel he's been liberally colonizing our stories. That's another story for another day, not just about Burns but about who gets to touch the historical Black image. To be honest, as an insatiable watcher of Black history on PBS, I'm on the fence about the matter, much as I am about Scorsese's *Blues*. Then again, I'm not a Black filmmaker who's been told *fuggedaboudit* because Burns practically owns the extant footage of Johnson or Martin Luther King Jr.

Johnson believed he countered the racism of his day simply by acting as if prejudice didn't exist. Ralph Ellison thought this very Zen form of Black being has always defined a particular African-American strain, even on the plantation. It is one whose attitude toward racism was to outfox and outfight it rather than lament it. What distinguished Johnson's defiance from even this white-man-do-your-worst strain is how openly oblivious, ostentatious and confrontational it was 24/7/365, particularly out of the ring: Johnson married three white

Greg Tate's books include Fly Boy in the Buttermilk; Everything But the Burden: What White People Are Taking From Black Culture; *and* Midnight Lightning: Jimi Hendrix and the Black Experience. *He is also the leader of the band Burnt Sugar.*

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women as indiscreetly as possible, at a time when, as Ward points out, "interracial marriage was officially outlawed in thirty of the forty-six states and discouraged by custom and the threat of violence in many of the rest. Nearly seven hundred Negroes had been lynched in the United States since 1900, some simply because someone had whispered that they had been 'too familiar' with white women."

Johnson received constant death threats, of course, but they seemed only to egg him on. Speaking about his love for barreling racing cars in town and country, he said, "One man gets shot in the leg and is killed. Another gets a bullet in his brain and lives.... I always take a chance on my pleasures."

Leaving aside the hysteria around race-mixing and African athleticism, what truly sets Johnson's time apart from our own is the comfort the nation's most respected newspapers took in race-baiting Johnson. Ward's book is a cornucopia of mean-minded little clips that vividly demonstrate the tremors of the master race, whose nights were spent awake in fear of a Black planet.

Given the amount of ink and brain time Norman Mailer and George Plimpton spent trying to penetrate the mind and meaning of Muhammad Ali, we shouldn't be surprised that less enlightened wits of a less enlightened time had their minds blown by Johnson's far more provocative presence decades earlier. Here, after all, was an unlettered Negro from Galveston, Texas, who slugged his way past a pileup of white hopes before forcing retired Jim Jeffries (who, like John Sullivan and Gentleman Jim Corbett before him, declared he would never fight a Negro for such a racially significant prize) to heed his brethren's behest and return to the ring for the sake of Anglo-Saxon manhood. An editor for the British magazine *Boxing* was compelled to confess:

> It is not so much a matter of racial pride as one of racial existence which urges us so ardently to desire the ex-boilermaker's triumph. The colored races outnumber the whites, and have hitherto only been kept in subjection by a recognition on their part of physical and mental inferiority.... Then came Jack Johnson's great triumph over Tommy Burns and White and Black stood before the world in suddenly inverted positions again. Here we are the hitherto dominant race, compelled to recognize that an American negro, the descendant of an emancipated slave, is the principal figure, our acknowledged master at the one great physical sport in which actual personal superiority can ever be authoritatively tested. Does anyone imagine for a moment that Johnson's success is without its political influence...?

To this teapot the *New York Times* added, "[We] hope that the white man may not lose...[and] will wait in open anxiety the news that he has licked the—well, since it must be in print, let us say the negro, even though it is not the first word that comes to the tongue's tip."

By all accounts, every white supremacist on the planet not in actual attendance at the historic Jeffries fight was at the telegraph office doors awaiting round reports. There was even, Burns's film shows, a crude version of instant replay invented for the fight in which two boxers, one Anglo and one Black, re-enacted the outcome of each round. The archival footage shows Jeffries's supporters leaving the newly constructed stadium with their heads hung so low there must have been no need to sweep up the sawdust and trash left behind.

The boxing world into which Johnson was born reads more as vaudeville, carny sideshow than gladiator arena where the fate of imperialist nations and KKK doctrines hung in the balance. Though the fight game stirred bluebloods into a frenzy, its habitués were more likely to be pimps, hustlers, whores and con artists, sports of the sporting life who placed a premium on grand, outlandish pomp and vice-filled pleasures. In this world Johnson was to the manner born. What anybody who knows the world of hip-hop can see from any photo of Johnson in street gear is that Johnson was a big-pimpin' baller who loved to dress his ass off, gamble and gambol with fellow playas of all colors and entertain women of easy virtue. Johnson's skill, style and verbal wit can start one to thinking that late-twentieth-century Black Masculinity as we've come to know it from BET and ESPN was, by and large, a Johnson invention.

The trippy thing about Johnson's self-invention, though, was that it didn't stop at just being a badass motherfucker. When you're told that he played classical piano duets with his wife and accompanied his prized collection of opera records on his bass viol, that he recited Kipling and provided court-stenographer evidence of how he adroitly demolished a British policeman during cross-examination in the magistrate system, you realize Johnson's mind was also a force to be reckoned with—even if, as late as the 1940s, James Thurber couldn't help rendering Johnson's quotes in minstrelese. (From recordings and court files we know Johnson's way around the English language easily matched the deep, dark, mellifluous ease of James Earl Jones.)

The book and film are subtitled *The Rise and Fall of Jack Johnson*, but when you take full measure of Johnson's expansive life and mind and his derring-do in globally eluding the US government for years by various crafty subterfuges (including overbilling the military for living expenses when he briefly turned spy during World War I!), you realize that Burns and Ward's Gibbonesque framing of his story probably misses the point. Here, after all, was a guy whose greatest fear in life was more likely boredom than anything else, including his own death.

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The sidebars of Johnson's life are a biographer's dream—even in his deepest decline they are immensely colorful and entertaining, as in gangster Owney Madden's 1923 takeover of the Café de Luxe, a club Johnson fronted for his mob partner, Budd Levy. Madden, by the way, renamed it the Cotton Club. Given Johnson's brains, guts, culture, charisma and ambition, becoming a world champion pugilist appears to have been a meager rise indeed—albeit the best one on the table for a brother at the time, not to mention one that netted him the equivalent of a million dollars in a single day.

In victory and defeat, though, Johnson seems to have kept getting bigger while the world got smaller. At his loss to Jess Willard in 1915 the pale throngs appropriately and without a hint of irony waved tiny white flags in support of their man while the *Detroit News* blared, "The Ethiopian has been eliminated...there will never be a black heavyweight champion." For his part, Johnson had always pshawed the notion that his fights were blows against the white empire on behalf of the beleaguered Black man. Hearing how nightriding mobs showed their murderous displeasure to his people after his defeat of Jeffries, Johnson probably decided they needed no further incitement from him. Only when it came to openly marrying white women did Johnson not seem to know how hard he could push against the color line.

Johnson's "fall" was largely the result of vehement and relentless Justice Department prosecution on a Mann Act charge. His real crime, he always thought, was whipping Jeffries; marrying not one but two white society women, the younger one only weeks after the first committed suicide, just might have provided the insult-to-injury tipping point. The Fed's lead witness was one of his jilted-prostitute lovers. When asked on the stand if she had ever loved Johnson, she coyly replied that she didn't know what love was. The seven years over which the fighter expended much of his wealth as a fugitive in Europe and Mexico after his conviction didn't leave him with much. There was even less after he surrendered to the Feds and remarkably served an unbowed and unbloodied year in the infamous Leavenworth penitentiary. Part of Johnson's haughtiness and hubris was born of innate confidence, but another part was his inordinate luck: When he went to prison the director of federal prisons was his old bud, former Nevada governor Denver Dickerson. Dickerson, who'd OK'd the Jeffries fight in Reno, insured that Johnson's year inside was a relative picnic—much to the consternation of the prison's petulant and pouting guards, men known more for their frequent, excessive inmate beatdowns than their complaint-box bitchery.

Like most champions, Johnson didn't know when to quit. Even before his release at age 43, he was trying to arrange a fight with then-champion Jack Dempsey, who, like his forebears, decided the trauma of losing the heavyweight belt to a Black man was not one he was going to inflict on the Anglo-Saxon race. Without a champ to fight, Johnson spent the last two decades of his life in pursuit of any sideshow that would employ him, though he never lacked for loyal female companionship. His second wife, Lucille, endured and even shone in Johnson's fugitive years—at one point during his trial getting Johnson's money back at gunpoint from a flim-flamming associate; Irene, his third wife, divorced her hubby to devote herself to Johnson for the lean and mean years ahead.

The story of Johnson's final years isn't pretty—his nights as a coonish entertainment in squalid Times Square dives rivals anything in *Raging Bull* for cringe-inducing Palookaville pathos—but it does have a certain quixotic charm. Whatever step Johnson may have lost as a boxer seems not to have diminished his dandyness, loquacity or enthusiasm for fast cars and the fast life.

What does seem to have finally made the tape become unglued was the rise of Joe Louis. Johnson had angled to become Louis's trainer and was received with open arms by the young champion. But Louis's handlers, who included a trainer who despised Johnson, had decided the road to the championship, closed to African-Americans since Johnson's victory over Jeffries, might be opened by a boxer who never smiled, taunted his opponents or publicly courted white women. Their gambit obviously worked, but not before irking Johnson, who took Louis's every success as an attack on him, and who not only badmouthed the upstart in the press but tried to train Louis's foes. This not only made Johnson look like a bitter, aging grappler; it cost him what little respect he had left in the African-American community.

Sadly yet appropriately, given what lay ahead on America's racial bend, Johnson's real fall to earth occurred one day in 1946, when he became enraged at being forced to dine in the back of a segregated Raleigh, North Carolina, restaurant and then fatally drove himself into a telephone pole. After so many dazzlingly decadent years defying and flying above the racial fray, Johnson's long-deferred Black Rage flared up in the heart of Dixie over not being able to share a dining room with crackers. The Freedom Riders surely would've empathized. ■

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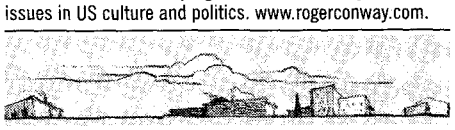

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POSITIONS AVAILABLE

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NATION STUDENT OUTREACH: Attention student activists! If you're involved in organizing a progressive event, lecture or film festival on your campus or in your community and would like to distribute copies of *The Nation*, please let us know by calling (212) 209-5416.

POSITIONS DESIRED

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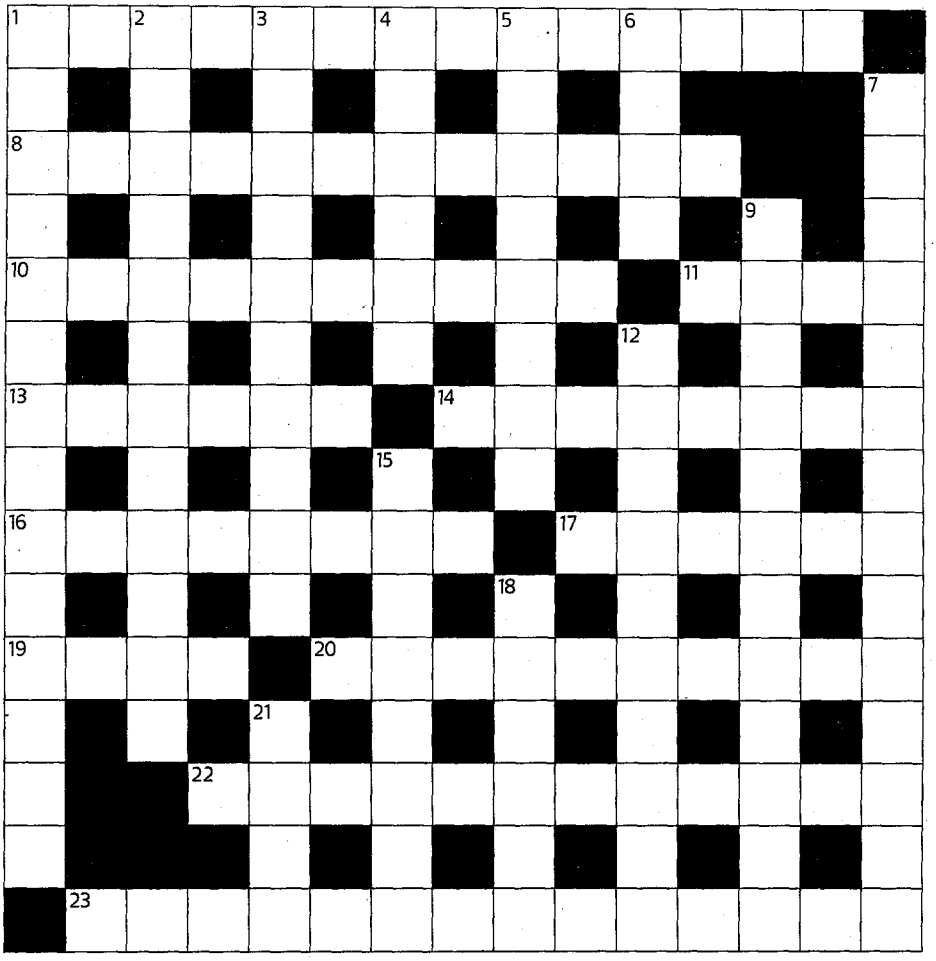
PUZZLE NO. 2976

FRANK W. LEWIS



ACROSS

1 The artists of seascapes, sometimes associated with hewers of wood. (7,2,5)

8 Traditionally made by a bee—not necessarily a queen, but perhaps a ruler. (8,4)

10 Came across, and possibly let an unspecified amount show up with a lot of spirit. (10)

11 Puts something in the pot holding 22? Best not! (4)

13 Not a particular person, but a state has first-class surroundings. (6)

14 Describing quarters fit for a king where Dad goes to the small city with a Spanish name to see a Spanish aunt at 50! (8)

16 What a soldier is expected to do is to maintain such as kitties and puppies when they return. (4,4)

17 A warning that you will find a hole in the mountain at the end of it. (6)

19 It may be fishy, but it's relatively disturbed by 6 down. (4)

20 Little Tom needs a tangled mop kept inside, with a disturbance caused by one of his fellow citizens. (10)

22 It might not be enough to drag the kitty in, just because you hold this. (5,2,1,4)

23 The result of sick pay? (3-6,5)

DOWN

1 It involved a two-by-two move for Noah. (14)

2 Would it be a shiny new coin that some think is worth a lot of money? (1,6,5)

3 Anything you eat has it. (10)

4 The mensch is mine, and you can see a split coming out of it. (6)

5 One might see the mule fall badly, getting a good dinner. (4,4)

6 Charley had one who said her place was where the nuts come from. (4)

7 Something you can bet on with a certain amount of freedom of action to a point, at the edges of a certain belt. (5,9)

9 Caesar's comment concerning Albion, after he landed, looked the people over, and beat them up. (4,4,4)

12 If people talk about things in a nosy way, they might have one. (5,5)

15 What one pays for housing that gets around a perennial presidential candidate? Such things stink! (8)

18 Be against the flower coming up with a stilted attitude? (6)

21 Catch flies, as some say, with such a rug showing tobacco, possibly! (4)

PUZZLED? No more cross words. If you don't see why "Lures" are "Ground Rules" send for those of Mr. Lewis to: Puzzled, The Nation, 33 Irving Place, New York, NY 10003, or access our website at www.thenation.com/about/crossword.mhtml.

SOLUTION TO PUZZLE NO. 2975

B	L	A	C	K	B	E	R	R	Y	■	P	A	L	M
A	■	C	■	I	■	M	■	E	■	S	■	P	■	I
B	A	C	K	S	U	P	■	L	O	W	D	O	W	N
E	■	O	■	S	■	A	■	I	■	O	■	S	■	D
S	T	R	A	I	N	T	H	E	T	R	U	T	H	■
I	■	D	■	N	■	H	■	F	■	D	■	L	■	K
N	O	S	E	G	A	Y	S	■	A	S	T	E	R	N
T	■	■	■	C	■	■	■	■	■	W	■	■	■	O
H	A	Y	M	O	W	■	D	I	S	A	L	L	O	W
E	■	O	■	U	■	E	■	N	■	L	■	O	■	I
■	P	U	T	S	O	N	E	S	E	L	F	O	U	T
W	■	N	■	I	■	Z	■	U	■	O	■	T	■	A
O	R	G	A	N	D	Y	■	R	A	W	D	E	A	L
O	■	E	■	S	■	M	■	E	■	E	■	R	■	L
D	A	R	N	■	T	E	R	R	O	R	I	S	T	S

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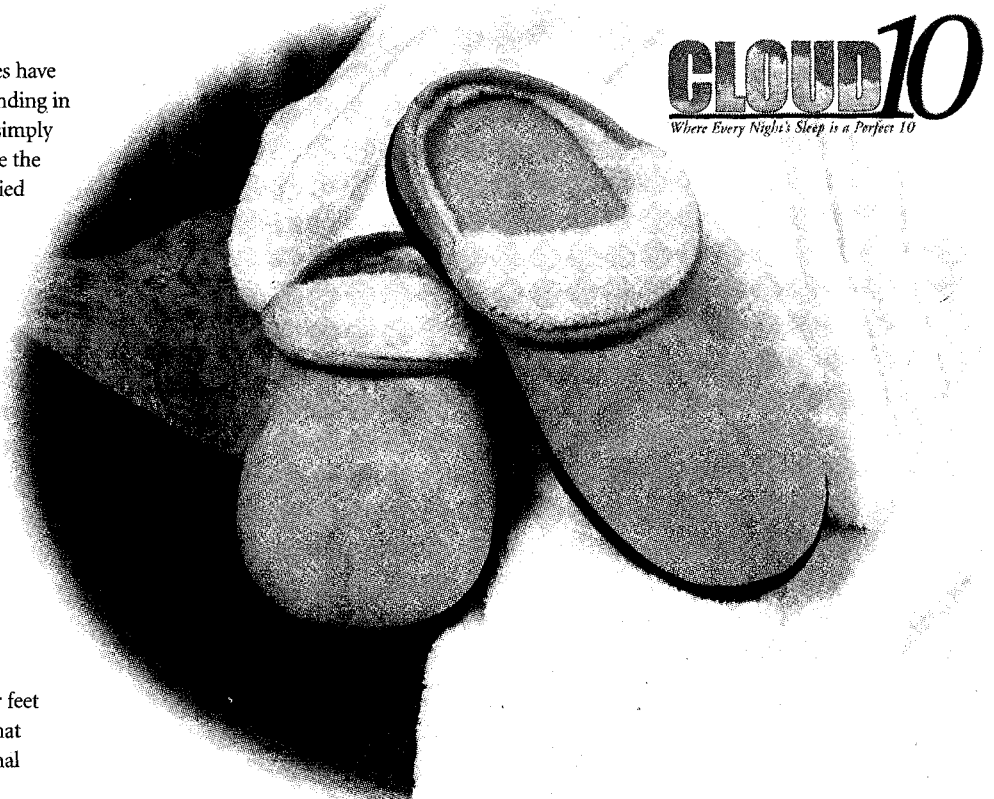
Relaxation therapy for your feet

Visco-elastic foam has changed the way people sleep, now it helps the way you walk.

by Leigh Ligon



My feet hurt! How many times have you heard *or* said that...standing in line at the grocery store or simply while doing daily routine tasks? I feel like the older I get the more my feet ache. I've tried elevating my feet, soaking them in a hot water and expensive massage therapy—but to no avail. That's why I'm so excited to tell you about my recent discovery—CLOUD 10 Slippers!

How did a NASA invention save my feet? From the moment I slipped them on, they molded to the shape of my feet like I had a custom fit pair of slippers made especially for me! The slipper's insole is made from visco-elastic memory foam originally created by NASA. This foam equalizes pressure, reduces stress and tension and provides incredible comfort.

According to the American Podiatric Medical Association, as people age, their feet tend to spread, and lose the fatty pads that cushion the bottom of the feet. Additional weight can affect the bone and ligament structure. These slippers mold to the contours of my feet through my body's heat and weight, literally cushioning every single step I take.

Technologically advanced slippers mold to the contours of your feet making each step feel like you're walking on Cloud 10!

Did you know that the average person takes 8,000 to 10,000 steps a day, which adds up to about 115,000 miles over a lifetime? That's enough to go around the circumference of the earth four times. No wonder we all have tired, aching feet.

I've heard about similar kinds of slippers, but I couldn't afford to spend nearly $70 a pair. The Cloud 10 Slippers were a much better fit for my budget. The outer material of these stylish slippers is beautiful tan faux suede and they feature a cozy, fleece-lined interior and collar to provide added warmth. The durable rubber sole is perfect for my quick trips outdoors to grab the morning paper.

❖ Inner sole is constructed from visco-elastic memory foam
❖ Body heat molds foam to cushion feet for maximum support
❖ Super-soft, fleece lining provides added warmth
❖ Durable rubber sole—perfect for quick outdoor trips!

If you have arthritic feet like I do, you suffer from inflammation and pain in your joints. Our feet have to last a lifetime and I've decided to stop neglecting the part of my body that keeps me mobile.

These slippers have a unisex design making them great for both men and women. I wear my Cloud 10 Slippers every chance I get and my feet have never felt so pampered.

Sink your feet into luxury. We are so confident that CLOUD 10 slippers will cushion your feet in complete comfort that we will offer you a no-questions asked in-home trial for 30 days. If you're not 100% completely satisfied just return them for a full refund of the purchase price.

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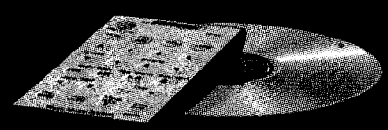

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ITS NEW ELEGANCE

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